



lituanus

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY • 1961 • VOLUME VII • NO. 2

l i t u a n u s

lithuanian quarterly

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Published in March, June, September
and December by the Lithuanian
Student Association, Inc.

Editorial and Subscription Office
916 WILLOUGHBY AVE.
BROOKLYN 21, N. Y.

Subscription price \$2.00 per year.

Second class postage paid at Brooklyn
Post Office.

VOLUME VII NO. 2
JUNE • 1961

CONTENTS

EXCERPT FROM A LETTER *by Romain Rolland*, 33 •
EXCERPT FROM A LETTER *by Bernhard Berenson*, 33 •
M. K. CIURLIONIS THE LITHUANIAN PAINTER *by*
George M. A. Hanfmann, 34, • CIURLIONIS SEEN AS
SYMBOLIST *by Aleksis Rannit*, 37 • CIURLIONIS AND
THE PROBLEM OF THE SYNTHESIS OF ARTS *by Vyacheslav*
Ivanov, 45 • EXCERPT FROM A LETTER *by*
Jacques Lipchitz, 58 • THE COSMIC ART OF M. K. CIUR-
LIONIS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS PAINT-
ING "REX" *by Raymond F. Piper*, 59 • IGOR STRAWINSKY
ON CIURLIONIS, 61 • M. K. CIURLIONIS THE COMPO-
SER, *by Vladas Jakubėnas*, 62 • *Contributors to this issue*, 64.

This issue is illustrated with reproductions of the works of
Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis • The portrait of the
artist on page 33 is a woodcut by Vytautas K. Jonynas
for the UNESCO publication "M. K. Ciurlionis pionnier
de l'art abstrait" by Aleksis Rannit, Paris, 1949 • On
the cover — a fragment of a vignette by Mikalojus Konstan-
tinus Ciurlionis for his musical composition (India ink draw-
ing, 1909) • The cover design by Kęstutis Cerkeliūnas.





M. K. ČIURLIONIS • 1875 - 1911

COMMEMORATING HIS DEATH FIFTY YEARS AGO

"It is difficult to express with words the excitement this extraordinary artist awakens in me, as one who not only has enriched the art of painting, but who also has expanded our horizon in the sphere of polyphony and rhythmicity. This is an entirely new spiritual continent and Čiurlionis is its first Christopher Columbus."

ROMAIN ROLLAND on ČIURLIONIS

From a letter to S. Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, 1930

"Of the great individualists of the new epoch, Čiurlionis must be given a foremost place. He must be understood and appreciated not only for the mystic and seer that he was, but also for his unique aesthetic and pictorial ideas."

BERNHARD BERENSON on ČIURLIONIS

From a letter to Aleksis Rannit, 1949

M. K. ČIURLIONIS

THE LITHUANIAN PAINTER

by GEORGE M. A. HANFMANN

Čiurlionis deserves to escape the oblivion that threatens him. He is virtually unknown in Central and Western Europe, to say nothing about this hemisphere.

The efforts of his compatriots have secured almost every one of his paintings and drawings for the museum of Vytautas the Great, in Kaunas, Lithuania — a museum, which does not normally appear on the art traveler's schedule. Yet Čiurlionis at his best is a great painter highly original and sincere of vision. In the Čiurlionis Gallery, where the reviewer last saw them, his pictures were subjected to that severest of all tests, the one-man-show. Čiurlionis passes the ordeal surprisingly well, better, in fact, than some of his French or German contemporaries of far greater renown.

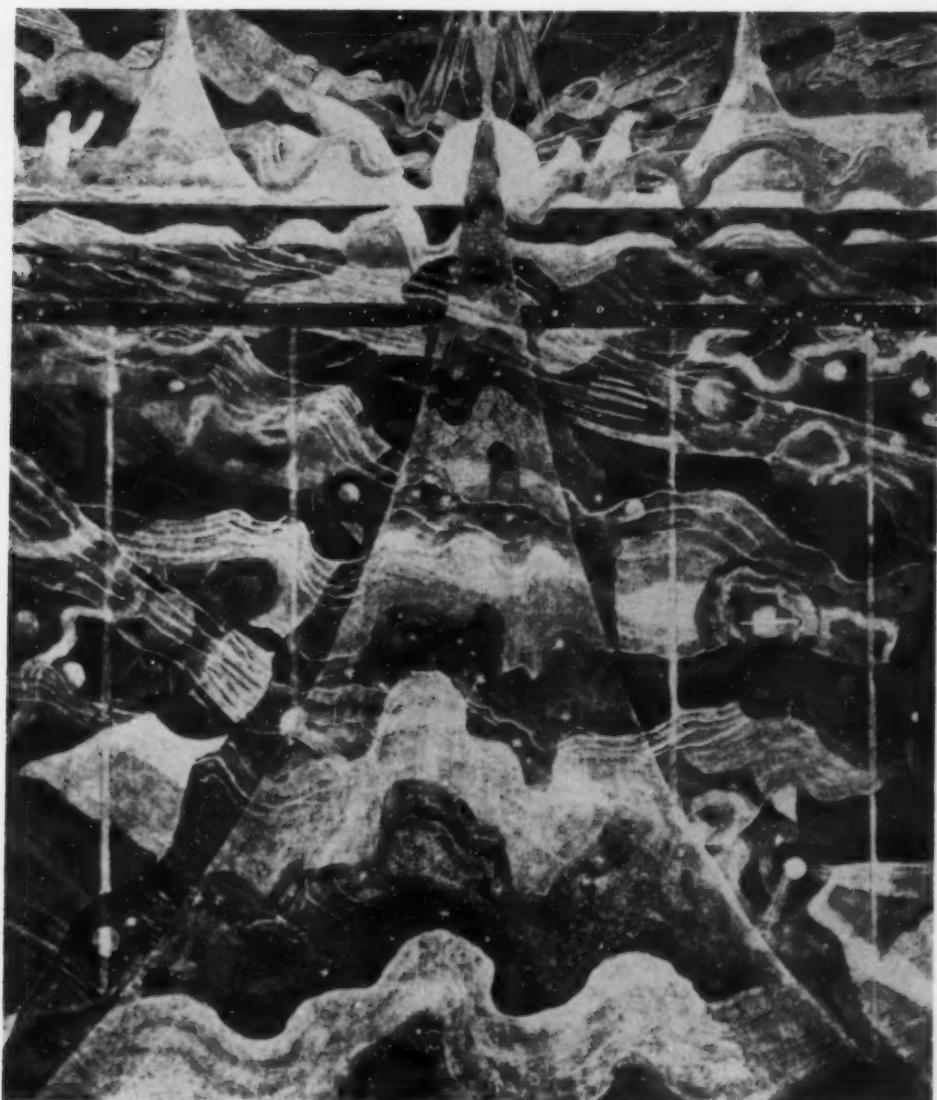
The life of Čiurlionis would make a fine novel, a psychological novel *au par* with the drama of Van Gogh. It is hard to avoid this comparison. Čiurlionis, like Vincent, does not start as a painter but is driven to painting as the means of expressing his convictions and his visions. He, too, with the tenacious perseverance of a peasant, learns almost unaided to paint. His notable pictures, like those of Van Gogh, all originate within a very few years of one another. He succumbs to the overpowering, high-strung intensity of his genius and dies in an insane asylum (1911) when only thirty-five years old.

In lives like these is something symptomatic of those times. Both Van Gogh and Čiurlionis are reformers - prophets trying to counteract the stress and pressure of a mechanized and complicated world, trying to fight for a more deeply conceived, heroic life, trying to discover the real meaning of life and universe. But tempting though it be to do so, the comparison should not be carried too far. Čiurlionis is a cosmic pantheist, not a religious reformer. His background is different not only from that of Van Gogh but also from that of any other Western European painter. Born in 1875 in peasant surroundings, the son of an organist in a Lithuanian village, he made his way as a musician with the support of Polish nobles and achieved high reputation as a musician and composer after studies in Warsaw and Leipzig. With unlimited industry and deadly seriousness he devoured European literature, philosophy, and science. His

favorite writers were Dostoyevski, E. A. Poe, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and the Scandinavian playwrights, a circumstance significant in that it reveals the romantic and fantastic side of his personality. More significant is his unamateurish absorption in the problems of the universe, manifested in his ardent devotion to astronomy. His deeply-rooted connection with his race was manifested by his leadership in the Lithuanian struggle against the Russian oppression and by his pioneering activity on the long-neglected Lithuanian folk song and art.

From earliest childhood Čiurlionis lived in contact with nature, and to Nature as a last and final resource he was to turn again and again in later life. One might almost say that he absorbed the enchanting, silent woods, the high horizons, the mysterious lakes of Lithuania to record them in painting in terms of his own experience.

He was driven to painting by his visions, which were at once visual, musical, and cosmic. Teachers and influences, first at the Art Academy in Warsaw, later in the artistic circle of Mir Iskusstva (World of Art) in St. Petersburg, contributed their share to his painting but hardly moulded his essential and individual qualities. To be sure, the Classicistic, exotic, and daemonic fantasies of Boecklin, Munch, Klinger, and Redon; the calligraphic artistries of Beardsley; the retrospective and luxurious art of Mir Iskusstva (Vrubel, Roerich, and the stage painters); and much of other strained and exaggerated fin de siècle refinement have found an echo in Čiurlionis' paintings. A few of his pictures are somewhat forced and decorative exhibitions, legendary and symbolical in character (Flute Player, Snake Sonata, A Composition). What puts him head and shoulders above most of these decadent figures is his sincerity, his genuine scientific penetration of the cosmos, his unsevered connection with the lingering pantheistic nature-worship of Old Lithuania. His early landscapes, simple, almost stylized in form, breathe a quiet dignity. His cosmic paintings (Signs of the Zodiac; the magnificent Sea Sonata; the Green Lightning) have the feeling of immensity of the modern cosmos, and, at the same time, a visionary, personal quality we cannot match unless we go back to German Romanticism and Caspar David Friedrich's Dresden Crucifixion. The "Ze-



SONATA OF THE STARS • ALLEGRO

Tempera • 1907

maitian Cemetery" sums up the lyric and legendary element of Lithuanian traditions. In other paintings he anticipates the surrealists in his ambiguous use of realistic forms, and Kandinsky's abstract painting in his static abstractions.

Color, originally a liability, becomes an asset in Čiurlionis' more advanced pictures, not without aid from Japanese prints. Within this advanced group

earlier pictures are painted in sensitive gradations of green, yellow, blue, or gray, later in richer, more solid colors. It is color that makes many of his compositions convincing.

As a painter who fully expressed the mentality of a nation, as a painter who convincingly showed the new universe, Čiurlionis will hold an honorable place in the history of European painting.



THE TRUTH (also called SELFPORTRAIT)

Pastel • 1904

ČIURLIONIS

SEEN AS SYMBOLIST

by ALEKSIS RANNIT

"Le Symbolisme ne réside pas dans une concordance esthétique: le Symbolisme n'est pas une Ecole. Il admet, au contraire, une quantité d'Ecoles, et des plus divergentes... L'Esthétique les divisait; L'Ethique les unissait."

VALÉRY

VARIÉTÉ — Existence du Symbolisme

*I stretch my hands on high
and touch the stars.
Now forth there peals
as from the illimitable crystal wheels
of the celestial spheres, a melody;
and as the circles roll
I tune the turning planets to my soul.*

MICKIEWICZ

(DZIADY — translated by George R. Noyes)

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Wassily Kandinsky, distinguished and honored intellectualist in the art of modern painting, a "steno-grapher of the absolute"¹ is by many authorities still considered the inventor of abstract formation and the very first theoretician of it. Even such outstanding writers on the subject as Ludwig Grote and Carola Giedion-Welcker² or Werner Haftmann have not investigated the Russian sources of the ideas of Kandinsky or studied carefully the works of his East European contemporaries and precursors. This is one of the weaknesses in the literature on Kandinsky, and is only explained by the fact that the majority of his critics have no knowledge of Russian. Thus, "le cas Kandinsky" is mostly present-

ed from the viewpoint of New York, Paris or Munich. Very seldom has anyone been interested in exploring in her art as well in her philosophy of art, East Europe's contribution both before and after 1911 to the evolution of Kandinsky's theories and works. No comparative study has been written on this "obscure" topic and only a few short articles and general statements have been recorded on it. One voice was heard 8 years ago when Georges Annenkov, himself a painter of visionary sensibility and distinction,³ described schematically in the magazine *Cimaise*⁴ the dramatic changes in Russian art at the beginning of the present century and the "heroic struggle" of Russian painters for abstractionism. The place of Kandinsky within this movement is clearly shown by Annenkov (who is one of his generous critics). How-

ever, it is not Kandinsky whom the author considers the revolutionary creator of abstract expression. G. Annenkov writes:

"Tout d'abord et quoique l'on dise sur les dates, l'art abstrait naquit et se manifesta bien avant que Kandinsky, Kupka, Mondrian, Larionov, Malévitch, Marc, Tatline, Robert et Sonia Delaunay, Picabia, Van Doesburg, Magnelli, Arp, Brancusi, Sophie Tauber-Arp et autres apparussent sur ce champ de bataille. Le premier peintre abstrait fut Tshurlianis, lithuanien, qui, courageusement, exposa des oeuvres non-figuratives dès 1906-1907, c'est-à-dire dans les premiers jours du cubisme. Bien que ses toiles n'aient provoqué alors, même chez les peintres d'avantgarde, que des sourires ironiques et condescendants, aucun artiste russe n'ignorait leur présence et leur signification prophétique... Malheureusement, son oeuvre n'est jamais (ou presque)⁵ parvenue au delà des frontières russes" (*Cimaise*, No. 2, 1953, pp. 16-17).^{6a}

Similar statements have been made by a number of writers. Charmion von Wiegand describing the situation of Russian art before 1911 comes to the following conclusion:

"Strangest of the anti-naturalistic painters was Nicolas Tschurlianis, first to abandon all subject-matter in his search for equivalent expressions in line and color for music. His work marks a real turning point. In this respect, he may be considered the ancestor of the Non-objective school of painters, who derive from Kandinsky. Tschurlianis died in 1911 but his paintings had a tremendous vogue in Russia prior to World War I".⁶

Hans Vollmer points out the purity of abstract character of the work of Ciurlionis:

"Seine nach Analogien einer symphonischen Komposition aufgebauten Bilder tragen rein abstrakten Charakter und zielen hauptsächlich auf eine Übermittlung symbolischer Bewegungs- und Ausdruckswerte".⁷

While focusing some attention upon the role which the work of Ciurlionis, in all probability, plays in the total development of non-figurative art, the present author will deal primarily with only one of the constituents in the complex of this still very little known, very little studied, but in his originality highly inspiring artist.

Ciurlionis, like Blake, Corot and Van Gogh, is in himself a strongly independent spirit. He was not interested in founding a movement and establishing himself as head of a new school. A shy and purely introspective person, he resented being typed as "ismatic" partisan of a new doctrine.⁸ The famous remark of Courbet in 1861: "There can be no schools; there are only painters" applies with singular aptness to Ciurlionis. It is certainly much harder to find for his art the proper place in the history of any single school than to do so for the stylistically pure realism of a Courbet. The expressive multiformity and complexity of the productions of this Lithuanian painter (who has often worked during the same period in completely different expressive manners) has created a controversy between many of

his critics. The literature on Ciurlionis is, therefore, like his art, such a variable phenomenon as to demand a many-sided illumination to bring out all its facets. This may be why the painter has been classified under so many "isms", including: symbolism, neoromanticism, impressionism, musicalism, cosmologism, abstractionism, Art Nouveau school, and surrealism. Every attempt at such resolute classification (employed for the whole work of the artist) only exposes its limitation.

The author of this essay is trying to show some of the important aspects of the criticism on Ciurlionis as a symbolist as well as to present some of his own symbolological ideas. But even within this one classificatory tendency, different authors have written diversified and conflicting interpretations. So the term "symbolism" embraces in reference to this artist, a number of dissimilar connotations. Students of Ciurlionis have only seldom discussed style-critically features of his specific works to authenticate this belonging to the school of symbolism; but have rather, generalized on the total effect of his use of images, — thereby adding to the confusion by failing to distinguish between symbolic and symbolistic elements.

A BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL NOTE

Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis, who first saw the light of day on September 22, 1875, at Varėna (Lithuania), and died at the age of 35 on April 10, 1911, at Pustelnik Sanatorium (near Warsaw), belongs to those chosen by Dionysus whom fate granted only a short span of time in which to give expression to the splendor of their visions. He left therefore, a limited number of works. His outward destiny resembles Vincent van Gogh in that, — like him, he had only about six years to complete his life's work, before insanity clouded his mind.

Recognized as a child prodigy, the field of music was first chosen for him. Accordingly, in 1902, he was graduated from the Konservatorium of Leipzig, and wrote a number of compositions, of which two symphonic poems, "The Forest" and "The Sea" deserve special mention.⁹ In his thirtieth year, already possessed of prophetic images of infinite and yet structurally organized, defined space,¹⁰ he despaired of his musical work and began to paint. The musical forms and compositional methods turn now to an innermost spirited experience of color and line. In 1905 he attended the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts; but only for a short time for he saw at once that what he desired to express could not be learned. So he interrupted his studies and remained forever an ingenious, self-taught painter. He wants, according to many writers, to paint music.¹¹ But it is not the musical tonalities of color that Ciurlionis sees the main aim of his painting; nor does he feel satisfied with the mystic life of pure color so clearly evident in some of his works. He strives after some kind of synthesis of time and space in the art of painting;



SONATA OF THE SUN • ANDANTE

Tempera • 1907

after something morphologically impossible, four-dimensional. Among the artist's contribution to modern formal organization (*formliche Gestaltung*) this one is of profoundly significant importance: the introduction of structural principia of music into the language of visual forms.

A musicologist and composer of refined imagination and formative strength, Ciurlionis creates a cosmic world of his own and builds up his paintings predominantly in contrapuntal manner and as a series of symphonic movements. Thus a range of his symbolic, abstract and surrealist compositions — "Sonata of the Sea", "Spring Sonata", "Sonata of

the Sun", "Pyramid Sonata", "Serpent Sonata" — come into being, each separate painting of which has in turn its special descriptive terms — Andante, Allegro, Scherzo, Finale (There is always a strong spatial continuity in Ciurlionis' work so that the observer can travel in imagination from Andante to Finale through a carefully planned structural design). Then follow his unique cyclic productions, — "Creation of Universe", "Zodiacal cycle", "Legend", and several other detached paintings. Only a few of these are works of immanent lyricism, or works which spiritualize romantic or illusional experience. In general, they are "reveries" which, having been trans-

lated into inherent artistic values, speak of an innermost Lithuanian pantheistic feeling rising out of mystic and mythological origins. Čiurlionis knows how to blend the structural and functional quality of forms with the sensation of the secrets of cosmic existence and fate and of the inexorable, invisible forces that dominate them. Out of greenish grounds' timeless shapes of transcendental character and remote forms of empirical worlds emerge from the depths of the universe. The images, often graphically outlined, seem to be meant to enhance the impressiveness of cosmical mirage, to swell the forms through contrapuntal and other repetitions toward a definitively dynamic and yet harmonious streaming, until at last the whole composition seems to be filled with a continuous correspondency of the elements rhythmically isomorphic in themselves. The compositions of Čiurlionis are often visual expressions of cosmological ideas, which develop out of musically-pictorial sensations into abstract design and new spatial organization, anticipating many essential attributes of the art of to-day.

Čiurlionis composed only with tempera. Being poor he had to do with cheap, bad paint. The tragic consequence of this (along with his lack of technical training in the preparation of a painting) is that his works, fifty years after their realization, have lost half their chromogenous qualities. The paintings, exhibited far away from the world centers of art in the Čiurlionis Gallery in Kaunas, Lithuania,¹² are gradually fading: they are "dying away" before the Western world has learned to know them. Noted critics, such as Alexandre Benois, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Sergei Makovski, Valerian Chudovski, Nikolai Woroblow, George M. Hanfmann, Nicolas Roerich, and Mstislav Dobuzhinski, have taken a special interest in the work of Čiurlionis. In 1939, Romain Rolland, a great admirer of the artist, intended visiting Lithuania and writing a book about him — which might have attracted to this strange, isolated painter some international attention. But war breaking out, Romain Rolland could not carry out his plan, and it is feared that Čiurlionis will survive only as a marginalia on the pages of the history of art. However, according to George M.A. Hanfmann: "as a painter who fully expressed the mentality of a nation, as a painter who convincingly showed the new universe, he (Čiurlionis) will hold an honorable place in the history of European painting".¹³

In the year 1911, which saw Kandinsky's first abstract painting, Čiurlionis who had been creating abstract and semiabstract works since 1904, died. The Lithuanian painter regarded the abstract as a retirement from detail and fortuitous in order to concentrate on essential and universal. His action was not a theoretical revolt, but a new revelation and symbolization of space. The diffusion of space and time, which once achieved its grandeur in the French Gothic cathedrals, found in works of Čiurlionis a new, highly individualistic realization, — one of the first attempts to express in the idiom of art the four-dimensional space-time continuum of Einstein's universe.

ČIURLIONIS AND THE SYMBOLIST PAINTERS

In many general books on the history of Russian and Lithuanian art, as well as in general studies of Lithuanian culture or civilization, Čiurlionis is often called "le grand peintre symboliste"¹⁴. Oskar Wulff in a detailed work emphasizes the importance of Čiurlionis within the landscape painting of the Russian symbolists:

"Seinen Gipfel erreicht der Symbolismus in der russischen Landschaftsmalerei sowenig in den Schöpfungen von Hausch, wie in denen Krymows. Das blieb einem Künstler litauischen Stammes in seinem kurzlebigen Schaffen vorbehalten, N. Čiurlionis..."¹⁵

The term "Symbolism" brings immediately to mind the "school" of French symbolists. As is well known, the movement called from its beginning "Symbolism" originated in Gauguin and was composed of young painters closely associated in friendship — Maurice Denis, Bonnard, Vuillard, and Rousset. This movement (sometimes called "Synthetism") was one of several varieties of post-impressionism, with the accent on decoration and heightened expressiveness. But even the most superficial style-critical investigation comparing the formal manner of Gauguin and his associates with that of Čiurlionis would show that no stylistic influences of the French painters appear in the work of Lithuanian artist.

However, there is an atmospheric similarity; for example, between Čiurlionis and a friend of Stéphane Mallarmé—Odilon Redon. It would be an inviting theme for a longer philosophical and psychological essay to show the similarities and polarities of their mysterious, bizarre visual sensations. So far as is known, Čiurlionis had never seen the works of Redon; nor is there any evidence that Redon, who died 5 years after Čiurlionis, was acquainted with those of the Lithuanian.¹⁶

Another French symbolist painter with whom Čiurlionis could perhaps, be compared is Eugène Carrière, although so far as is known to the author, no critic of Čiurlionis has discovered any such possible relation. In the work of both the things represented are at a remote distance. In dissolving sharp contours in smokehued mist, suggestive of "myopic" vision, the paintings of Carrière could also be related to a number of earlier works of Čiurlionis. In Carrière's, Redon's and Čiurlionis' formations the artistic sense does not reign alone. Reason is closely associated with sensibility and sentiment. That is often the secret of their magic and fascination. But this kind of relationship can be easily explained by the general and historical color of the "Zeitgeist".

Since no evident formal connection exists between Čiurlionis and the French symbolists one wonders whether any correlation is present between him and the Russian symbolists. The "School" of French symbolists was a diversified formal expression based on a moral decorum. Speaking of Russian symbolists even such a vague inter-dependency was never manifested between them. — The whole Russian symbolist "movement" consists of only two noted artists —



COMPOSITION

India ink drawing: • 1906

Mikhail Vrubel' and Nicolas Roerich. Vrubel' a Pole by birth, a great visionary realist and a demon worshipper who, like Ciurlionis, died insane, must be considered among East European painters and sculptors one of the most gifted. Roerich, a pupil of Puvis de Chavannes, was a rational artist who wanted to be a mystical symbolist and who tried to create the illusion of depth on a flat surface. His form is only seldom stronger than the illustrative contents of his works.

In chimerical dynamics one could see some kind of psychical apposition between Vrubel' and Ciurlionis, but the form of the latter is much more withdrawn, detached, abstract. Comparing the pictorial sonatas of Ciurlionis with the always readable apparitions of Vrubel', the critic would immediately recognize the very strong use of intermediaries by Ciurlionis, as means of establishing contact with objects so universal, so extended in space or time, or so remote from approach as to be wholly inaccessible to direct intuition. No stylistic rapport can be seen between Vrubel', Ciurlionis and Roerich.¹⁷ With the exception of the general kind of information on Russian symbolism, where the names of Vrubel' and Ciurlionis are some time put next to each other,¹⁸ no comparative article on their aesthetics and symbolic ideas has appeared.

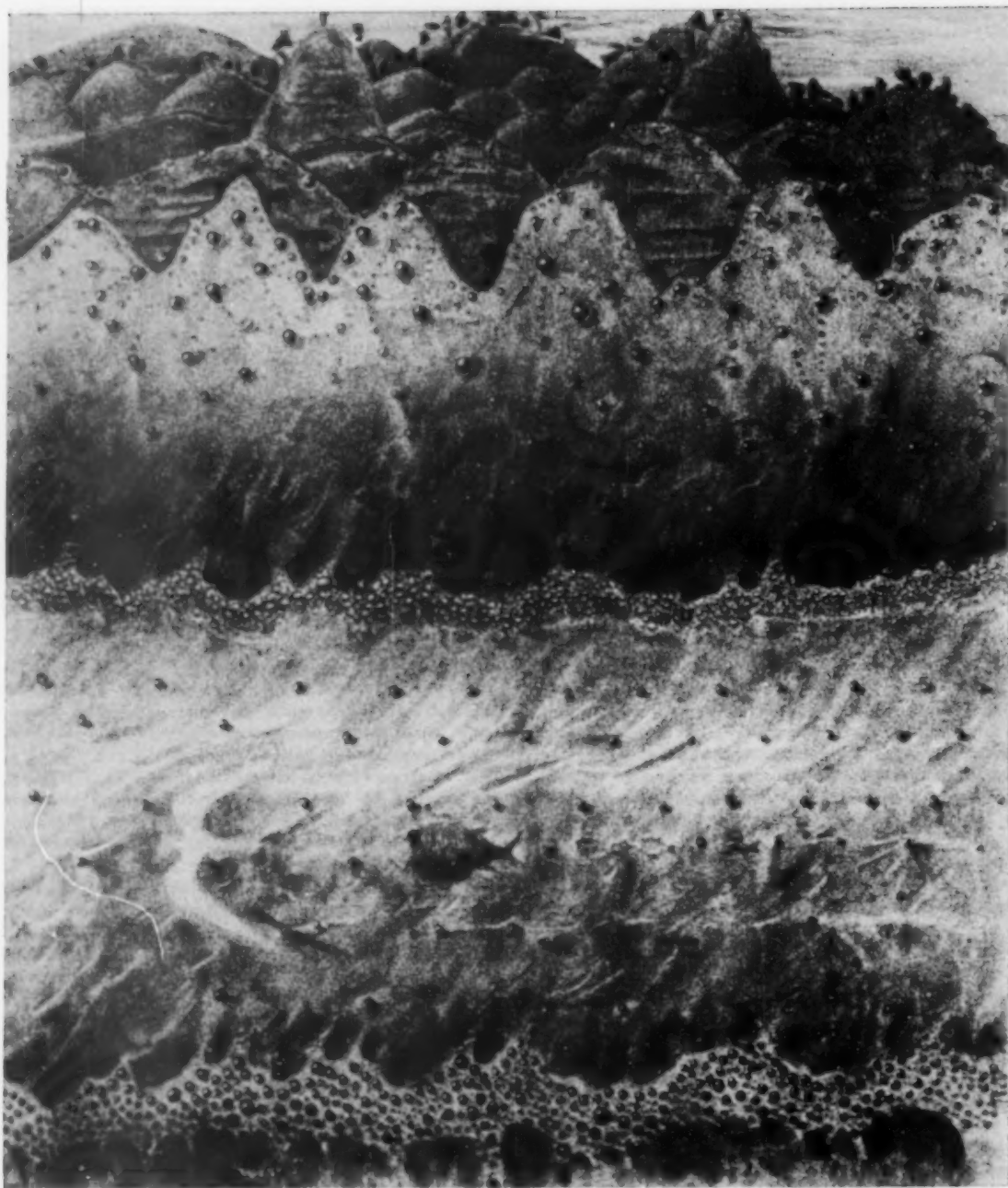
Although, no formal analogy could be established between Ciurlionis and French or Russian symbolists, the critic may think of the early works of the Lithuanian artist painted in Warsaw, and of the possible

contact with the Polish symbolists. Giuseppe Salvatore in his short lexicographical article on Ciurlionis¹⁹ gives emphasis to such an influence:

"Nei suoi primi quadri... si risente l'influenza del simbolismo polacco, ma ben presto egli si libera da qualsiasi tendenza per seguire la sua ispirazione nutrita da una concezione storica, religiosa e filosofica del mondo tutta personale."

Nikolaj Woroblow describes the unimportance of the effects of Polish symbolism on the very early works of Ciurlionis:

"Das esoterisch-symbolistische Getue verfehlt seine Anziehungskraft auch nicht auf die jungen Polen, die als Slaven ohnehin dazu neigten, den Anteil der Idee und der Stimmung auf Kosten des Bildkünstlerischen zu betonen. Auch Ciurlionis muss aus diesem Kreise manche Anregungen empfangen haben. Viele seiner damals entstandenen Skizzen und Gemälde-Raetseln des "Sztuka" — Malers Mieczislaw Jakimowicz, der seine Manier sowohl Klimt wie Knopf entlehnte. Der Einfluss des provinziellen Secessionismus bedeutete fuer die Malerei Ciurlionis' zunaechst nur eine Infektion mit Kunstfremden Literatur-Elementen, die sein wahres Wollen voruebergehend verdunkelte. Aber bereits in einigen der fruehen Bilder tritt das ihm Wesensgemaeße mehr oder weniger deutlich hervor. Hinter den "Von des Gedankens Blaesse angekraenkelt" symbolistischen Aeusserlichkeiten entdeckt man die ganz persoenliche Seelenhaltung Ciurlionis': kontemplative Ruhe, ein Sich-verlieren in die Lautlosigkeit verklaerter Himmels-



SONATA OF THE SEA • ALLEGRO

Tempera • 1908

raeume, in die Unendlichkeit unvordenklich aller Zeiten".²⁰

We see that the Warsaw symbolist intermezzo has no real significance in the development of the very personal form-language of Ciurlionis.

SYMBOLISM OF FORM IN THE EXPRESSION OF CIURLIONIS

Ciurlionis is a "symbolist" who does not properly belong to the school of symbolists and who does

not use the formal principles, methods and theories of any of the symbolist painters; but whose realization of the symbolic nature of form is manifested in almost every painting which he produced. The symbolic particularity of his forms is one of the most obscure, most difficult problems which creativeness of Ciurlionis presents, and it is no wonder that there has never been a thorough investigation of it. It would necessitate a long study, for example in the frame of the activities of the Warburg Institute of London University, to examine the symbolic meanings of all the forms expressing the invisible in the productions of Ciurlionis; for his apparent intention was only a method of revealing or suggesting the immaterial ideal, the intangible truth or state. Thus far the only critic who has touched the problem of form serving as symbol is B.A. Lehmann. In a short monograph on Ciurlionis²⁷ he accentuates the importance of the stormy spirals, ellipses and circular movements in artist's work. — "Matching various combinations of whirl-like spirals and circles, Ciurlionis attempted to convey the empirical images as if he would discover in them the schemes of rotating atomic particles of substance. In the interpretation of Ciurlionis spheres, circles and ellipses have always been characteristic symbols of the rhythm of life. He is, perhaps, the only one deserving to be called an adept of Cosmic religion. This at first sight, may be, too premature an assertion finds its poignantly terrifying realization at the end of artist's life."

Although, the problem is generally unexplored, the present author feels it is of sufficient importance to warrant documenting some of the symbolological ideas of the artist as revealed in his works, supplementing them with his own hypotheses. —

The art of Ciurlionis of any period is an expression attached to, and dependent upon a metaphysical doctrine for which it receives not only its subject-matter, but also rules for the composition of images and the treatment of form. Such art does not exist for the sake of its own achievement (and these are — for example — the main characteristics dividing Ciurlionis and the group of "Mir Iskusstva"), but for the sake of realizing a personal, transcendent "truth". Its main purpose is to be the exponent of the individualistic doctrine and a support to religious (broadly speaking: pantheistic) and mythically spiritual aspiration. It will not, therefore, deal with the varied aspects of phenomenal life for the sake of their own emotional interest, but only as mirrors of a higher reality. It will not dwell on the transient, accidental elusive aspects of things, but on their essential being. It will strive to transfigure and to transpose the material world of forms into the world of "ideas", from which it is derived.

Since the art of Ciurlionis, then will only partly give a sensory illusion of the material texture of this world, it will generally avoid using the naturalistic, realistic form-language of profane art. In order to seize upon the spiritual aspect of things it is bound to ignore all that is material and irrelevant in appearance so as to fall back upon their archetypal

configuration. This involves transfiguration of phenomenal entities into essential qualities in the sense of Platonic "Ideas". Form qualified may retain only an analogical resemblance to factual appearance, but since it is truer metaphysically it will acquire potential symbol value.

For the purpose of analysis, Lithuanian folk art gives often clear, substantial evidence of the working principles of symbolic form. Lithuanian folk art in its most distinctive formal organization has always been governed by transcendental vision and has achieved a rare purity in the integration of all living form into geometrical and architectural patterns, without depriving it of movement, organic vitality and intense expressiveness — rather, on the contrary, enhancing these. The old crosses standing outside Lithuanian peasant houses are, with all their plastic exuberance, no mere decoration, but integral structural parts of the landscape. Their meaning as well as their position and form governed by the similar laws that govern the metaphysical plan of Ciurlionis' compositions.

Linear, geometrical and decorative forms are here essentially functional (not in a mechanical, material sense of a Léger), but transcendently. They are not the amorphic abstractions of a Kandinsky, but living images of cosmic forces. They are the graphics of definite processes, of laws and energies, that act alike on sensible and supersensible levels. Quite apart from mathematical definitions, it is this specific morphology of abstracted figures which is the basis of all symbolic form, whether it be pure, or qualifying and circumscribing natural form.

It may be helpful to an understanding of Ciurlionis' symbolism to make a rough analysis of the essential properties of his fundamental forms.

The sphere is for Ciurlionis a body of perfect cohesion, fullness and unity, determined by a centre equidistant from every point of its circumference. Its energy is centripetal when it is drawn in towards the centre, and centrifugal when it expands towards the circumference. As in Greek metaphysics, the sphere in the art of Ciurlionis represents universal manifestation, the totality of existence, emanating from the One (whom Ciurlionis has called "Rex"), the immanent central principle, and finally reabsorbed into it.

The spheroid can be considered as a sphere in the process of pulling itself as under into two separate units, each with its own centre. It represents disruption of unity, division of wholeness for the sake of multiplicity.

The cylinder an eminently dynamic form in the work of Ciurlionis, is a compact sheaf of parallel energies, pushing in both directions along its longitudinal axis into limitless extension ("Sonata of the Stars", "The Legend").

The circle represents for Ciurlionis the cycle of cosmic existence, the law according to which everything proceeds into manifestations and is again withdrawn.

The spiral, when it coils inward in narrowing circles, suggests expansion, evolution.

The triangle has also a strong inner cohesion, for each of its sides is connected with both the others; each is in opposition to and complementary to the others: their balanced tension is one of unassailable unity in plurality ("Pyramid Sonata", "Sonata of the Stars" "Chaos", Andante). Leaving aside all the complex and subtle symbolism implied in oriental trinity (the three in one), which has influenced Ciurlionis, we shall only point out its purely plastic symbolism. The triangle when becoming a number of bodies ("Sonata of the Sun", Andante) stands for the power of operative manifestation in space and time.

The curved line is in Ciurlionis not merely a decorative element of so-called Jugendstil, it always delimits or encloses a portion of space and thus originates shape. His double curve, bending in different directions, suggests a restless forward drive of form, progression by alternation from one opposite to another.

Such transfigured form-language cannot be approached either discursively or sentimentally, for it directly touches our inner awareness of cosmic correspondences. It awakens a response in us from the irrational depths of our being.

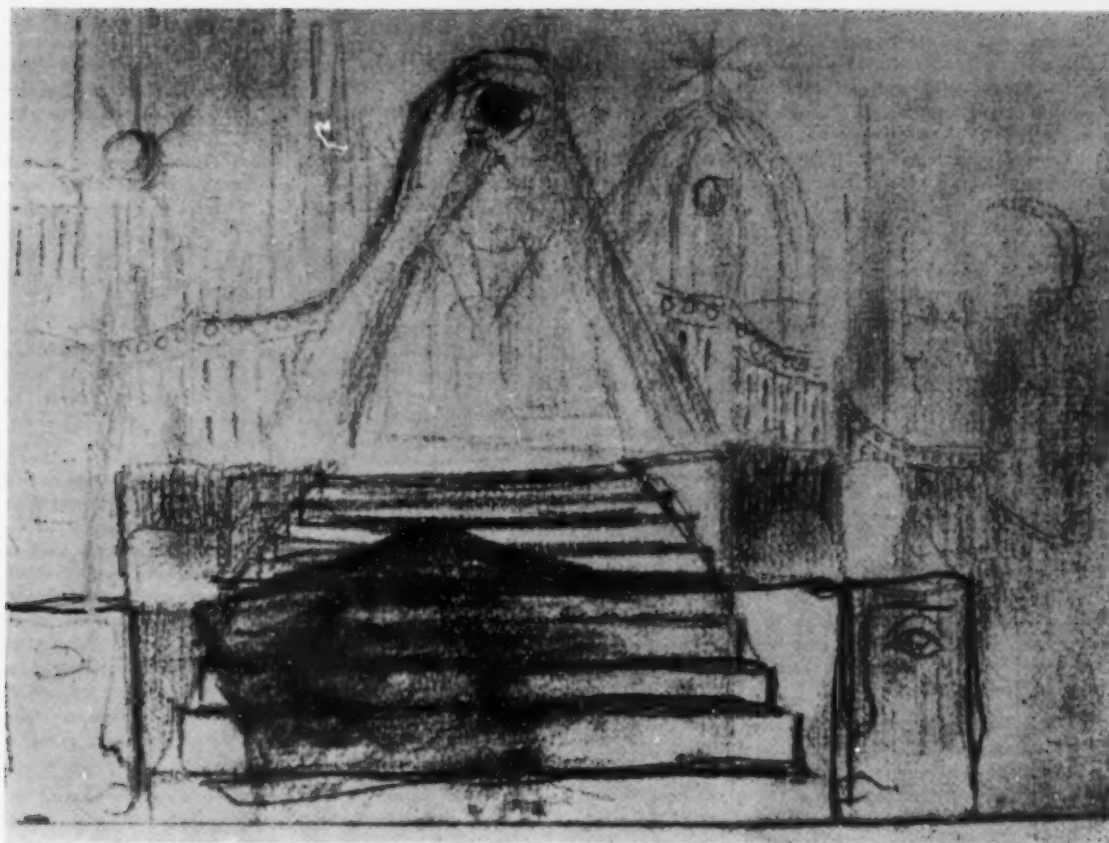
Like in his music, the artist uses the pictorial form in rhythmic sequences in an interplay of parallel and opposite movement, resulting in a closely knit harmony which, instead of evolving in time, spreads itself out in space. In these free rhythms is echoed the rhythm of the universe of Ciurlionis.

This language of symbolic form addressed itself to a people whose vision was not dulled by a mechanical education, but whose senses were alert and whose minds were capable of grasping the message of form. They did not live divorced from contact with nature. They lived with their often bare feet on the bare ground. When in 1908 the cosmic paintings of Ciurlionis were exhibited for the first time in Lithuania the simple peasants understood them intuitively, because to their eyes and minds cosmic backgrounds were ever present. Their feeling was nourished by the harmony of forms in nature. These people handled the raw materials of the earth (they did not like machines or machine-made articles) and in obedience to the natural laws of harmony created objects of beauty for their saints and for themselves. Their knowledge of form was thus born of experience, renewed every day and gathered up through generations; and it gave substance and plasticity to their thinking and feeling. It endowed them with creative imagination, which was capable of translating any natural form into an analogy, into a symbol of deeper significance.

If such inner visualization of metaphysical truths was possible, it was because Ciurlionis knew through experience and meditation, the relationship between concept and form, between a principle and its visible expression. Through intellectual and emotional awareness of these correspondences, he was able to compose the various elements of an image into the particular harmony which would, most comprehensively mirror the chosen aspect of a new reality.

NOTES

- ¹ Belli, Carlo. "KN". Milan, 1935, p. 11.
- ² Bill, Max (et autres). "Wassily Kandinsky". Boston - Paris, 1951, pp. 22-25, 99-107.
- ³ Haftmann, Werner. "Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert". Munich, 1954, pp. 206-7.
- ⁴ Maurice Raynal has called G. Annenkov "one of the greatest contemporary artists". (In: Catalog of Annenkov exhibition, John Becker gallery, N. Y., 1931.)
- ⁵ Annenkov, Georges. "Les temps héroïques. Les débuts de l'art abstrait en Russie". Cimaize. (Paris), No. 2, 1953 and No. 4, 1954.
- ^{6a} The paintings of Ciurlionis have been never exhibited outside Lithuania, Poland and Russia. A. R.
- ⁶ Von Wiegand, Charmion. "Russian Arts". In Encyclopedia of the Arts, New York, 1946, p. 874.
- ⁷ Vollmer, Hans, ed. "Ciurlionis". In Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Kuenstler des XX. Jahrhunderts, Vol. 1, Leipzig, 1953, p. 444.
- ⁸ Mrs. Sofija Ciurlionis, the widow of the artist, told me in 1940 about the letter the artist has written in 1909 to the Theosophic Society in St. Petersburg, rejecting categorically any relationship to any modern religious or philosophical theories and dogmas in his work.
- ⁹ The most exhaustive account of his musical production is made by the Lithuanian musicologist Vladas Jakubėnas. See his essay "M. K. Ciurlionis—muzikas" in the publication No. 9 of the Museum of Vytautas the Great; "M. K. Ciurlionis", ed. by P. Galaunė, Kaunas, Lithuania, 1938, pp. 21-33 (In Lithuanian). The essay appears in English translation for the first time in this issue of Lituanus (translated by Elena Marijodūtė-Vaišnienė). See also "Lithuanian Music Prior to 1918" by Leonard Simutis, Jr., Lituanus, December 1956, pp. 10-13.
- ¹⁰ The experience of space in the work of Ciurlionis is briefly discussed in the fine analysis of Valerian Chudovski: "N. K. Ciurlionis. Otryvki". In Apollon No. 3, 1914, pp. 22-58.
- ¹¹ There has been a great controversy and a great variety of theories within this problem that can not be brought under one common denominator.
- ¹² No work of his is represented in the museums or private collections of the Western World. A. R.
- ¹³ "Art Bulletin", XXXI, June 1939, p. 206. (The review of George M. A. Hanfmann is thus far the only discussion of quality written in English on Ciurlionis.)
- ¹⁴ Chambon, Henry de. "La Lithuanie Moderne", Paris, 1933, p. 239.
- ¹⁵ Wulff, Oskar. "Die Neurussische Kunst im Rahmen der Kulturentwicklung Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis zur Revolution", Augsburg, 1932, Textband, p. 361.
- ¹⁶ The problem of possible inner analogy between Ciurlionis and Redon has been mentioned by M. Dobuzhinski in his "Mano atsiminimai apie Ciurlionį" ("My recollections about Ciurlionis") in the op. cit. of the Museum of Vytautas the Great, p. 94, by George M. A. Hanfmann, op. cit.; by Werner Haftmann, op. cit.; and others. Nikolaj Woroblow in his monograph "M. K. Ciurlionis. Der litauische Maler und Musiker", Kaunas, 1936, p. 15, states: "Man wird an aehnliche traumhafte Motive Odilon Redons erinnert. Doch erstreckt sich die Verwandtschaft nur auf die Art der Vision." — The book by Woroblow is well documented, and is an excellent description of the activities of the artist. However, the author arrives at no conclusion and does not try to find a place for Ciurlionis in modern painting. Misleading also is the selection of reproductions. A number of important works of Ciurlionis are excluded, because the publisher tried to represent all works with Lithuanian motifs.
- ¹⁷ Nicolas Roerich has made a critical contribution on the principles of Ciurlionis' art in an essay called "M. K. Ciurlionis", published in Lithuanian magazine Naujoji Romuva, No. 41, 1936.
- ¹⁸ Like, for example, in the article on symbolism in Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, vol. 61, Moscow, 1934, pp. 776.
- ¹⁹ Enciclopedia Italiana, v. 10 (1931), p. 508.
- ²⁰ op. cit., p. 18.
- ²¹ Lehmann, B. A. "Ciurlionis", Peterburg, 1916, sec. ed., p. 22. On the other hand, Lehmann's ideas of connecting the art of Ciurlionis with theosophic tendencies are misleading. The biological thinking has a privileged place in theosophy, also the reincarnation of impersonal soul in many personalities. These and similar theories have nothing to do with Ciurlionis' conception of things. The Lithuanian artist is a speculative philosopher.



FROM THE CYCLE "DELUGE"

Pencil drawing • 1904

ČIURLIONIS

AND THE PROBLEM OF THE SYNTHESIS OF ARTS

by VYACHESLAV IVANOV

"The visionary art of Čiurlionis approaches clairvoyance. His spirituality is most winning and convincing when the artist engages himself in making painting supernatural, i.e. when he yields to his gift of double vision. Thanks to this double-vision the forms through which he expresses the real world approach a simplicity of design which becomes translucent. Reduced to its basic qualities this world re-

tains only the geometric and rhythmic principles of its essence. Space itself is nearly conquered by the transparency of forms which do not exclude but rather absorb the neighbouring forms. This geometrical transparency seems to be an attempt to approach the possibilities of visual signalization of such conception that the three dimensions we have on disposal are insufficient...

"Cosmic and supernatural grasp of things makes Ciurlionis' rather scarce work an important part in the history of future visionary art. It is impossible not to notice, that the pathos of Ciurlionis is not a pathos of a dream or illusion but it is "profession de foi" of his "Weltanschauung" — a confession of his inner vision, voice of those spiritual emotions in human beings which Dante used to call "spiriti del viso". The other significant moment of his pathos "Sursum" is the constant return to the sources of Plato's ideas and Pythagoras' theory of numbers. This is the source of the upward thrust in his work — the steeply ascending staircases, the crowded obelisks which compete and aspire to the monad of monads.

"Ciurlionis stubbornly and mightily struggles with mania. But it watches over him, it takes him prisoner by confusing the concepts of consciousness, by displacement of space gradations and things, by associating together through transparency and co-existence their forms and principles and by interweaving heterogeneous laws of the multiform existence. His life became entangled with the fibres of the tail of an apocalyptic comet, which lured and abducted him away from the earth. He constantly pierced with these fibres — his pyramids and cliffs. Peaks and summits lost themselves in clouds only to reappear again. Thus this spirit escaped the earth to aspire God.

"This visionary artist was blessed with the memory of myth. Not all of us have forgotten his imagery and symbols. Or maybe mankind recalls them as it does recall the original riches of the great cosmogony which left upon us forever an impression in our most secluded consciousness. We vaguely remember the air full of moisture laden with concentrated fumes raised from the distant seas. This air is somewhat transparent making matter which was not quite hardened even more transparent. We also remember the sharp peaks bordered by simple triangular masses, the arks on the peaks of precipitous cliffs and the fuming sacrificial altars in the mountains. Something ancient and yet resounding, similar to the ringing bells of a city submerged into the ocean's depths, meets — oh, madness! — with the apocalyptic infinity of forthcoming mysteries. The prophet clearly sees the shadow of the pale horse flying over the creative power of the spoken word..."

These were my first impressions from the fleeting and casual acquaintance with some of Ciurlionis' works shown during his lifetime at a St. Petersburg exhibition. My attention was called to it by M. V. Dobuzhinski. Ciurlionis died in March, 1911 at the age of 35 and that spring I wrote about him to S.K. Makovski (see Apollon, May 1911) in words I use here. The words I used at that time seem to me now essentially correct and therefore I use this synthetic evaluation as an introduction to the following analytical sketch which is based on more complete and profound study.

There is no doubt that Ciurlionis belongs to the most enigmatic artists. But what is the reason that an artist would leave upon us the impression of being enigmatic?

Sometimes the very object of the painting seems to us as mysterious and obscure. There is no way for us to know why in Titian's painting called "Heavenly and Earthly Love" these two feminine figures, while Eros is playing with them, are sitting each on opposite end of a marble sarcophagus, one half-nude and lifting a church lamp, the other splendidly overdressed. We do not know why Luca Signorelli gathered all kinds of figures on his canvas representing "The Education of Pan". In cases such as mentioned above we are usually asking ourselves what do the images we have before our eyes mean, and what was it the artist intended to convey to us.

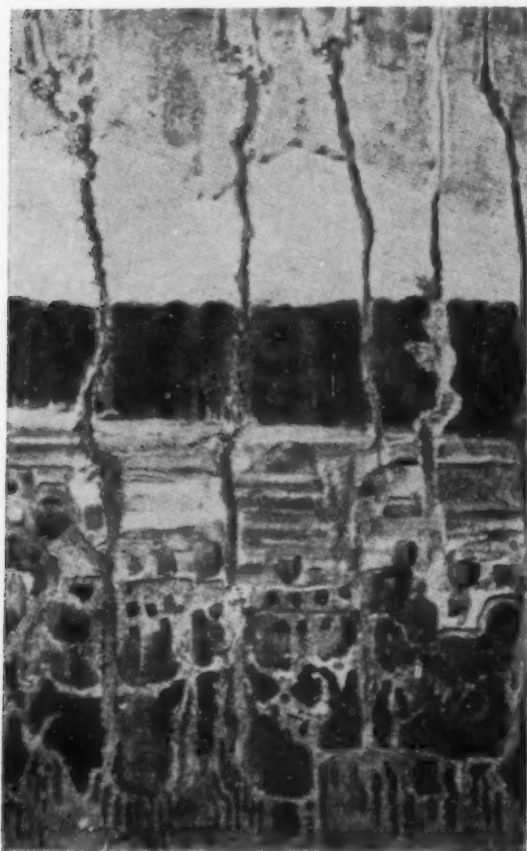
Much finer and deeper is the impression of a mystery present, when the image — this wordless story told in color — is in itself quite clear to us — but its magic impression upon the spectator's soul is incomprehensible — having in mind the uncontrolled, vague perplexity which the "magician of the brush" makes us experience while all we have before us is the plain reality. In other words only a portrait of a gently smiling young woman, a Florentine patrician, Madonna Lisa. In this case it is difficult to determine what really excites us — the portrayed face with its smile or the way the artist saw and presented this face and smile.

The painter's testimony — how he sees the visible universe (which we also see, but see it differently) — this is the real mystery of a painter, the joyful answer to which removes the cover from our eyes and forever enriches mankind with new visions. For the true creative artists are before anything else the witnesses of those things which they see in the visible universe. We begin to see clearly not through their dreams but through their interpretation of the reality and what this interpretation contributed to their dream-world.

In Ciurlionis' work two things are mysterious. What he, the clairvoyant of the invisible worlds, saw and what he saw as vigilant observer of our world. In order to be able to come nearer to his comprehension, it is necessary, so we think, to concentrate primarily on the second of those two cases and as much as possible to realize his peculiar ability to transform in his original way the most simple visual impressions. For the starting point of his painting, as is confirmed in a study of his work, is visual reality. From this reality he aspires to the spheres which are already unreal, which he sees beyond the limits of the reality: a realibus ad realiora ascendit, i.e. he ascends from the reality to the most real — he fancies to outline something insignificant and humble (a hut or a tree) as if it were the measure of something great and cosmically solemn which will develop from the reality when the seraph will touch his "prophetic eye".

So how and by what law does the distant and immense grow up from the familiar and trifling? To answer this question one must first of all describe Ciurlionis' peculiar novel method of rendering this transformation. Ciurlionis' method in our opinion is the artistic treatment of the elements of visual contemplation according to the principle derived from music.

In order to examine the correctness of this statement let us ask ourselves: what distinctions should art have which is based upon the application of such a method? What spiritual features does this method logically predetermine? From the above expressed opinion necessarily develop three consequences: 1. Recurring theme of the original form taken from reality which will imperceptibly wander away from an empirical world into the sphere of ideal or fantastic forms. 2. Forms derived from music which lose their material substance and become saturated with the psychic element. 3. The forms remain true to their archetype as seen by the eye. However these forms



FROM THE CYCLE "SUMMER"

Tempera • 1906

have the tendency to become so general that they become abstract, thus uncovering in the form the basic and unchanging type, in other words the archetype of the form. All three mentioned peculiarities are characteristic in Ciurlionis' work.

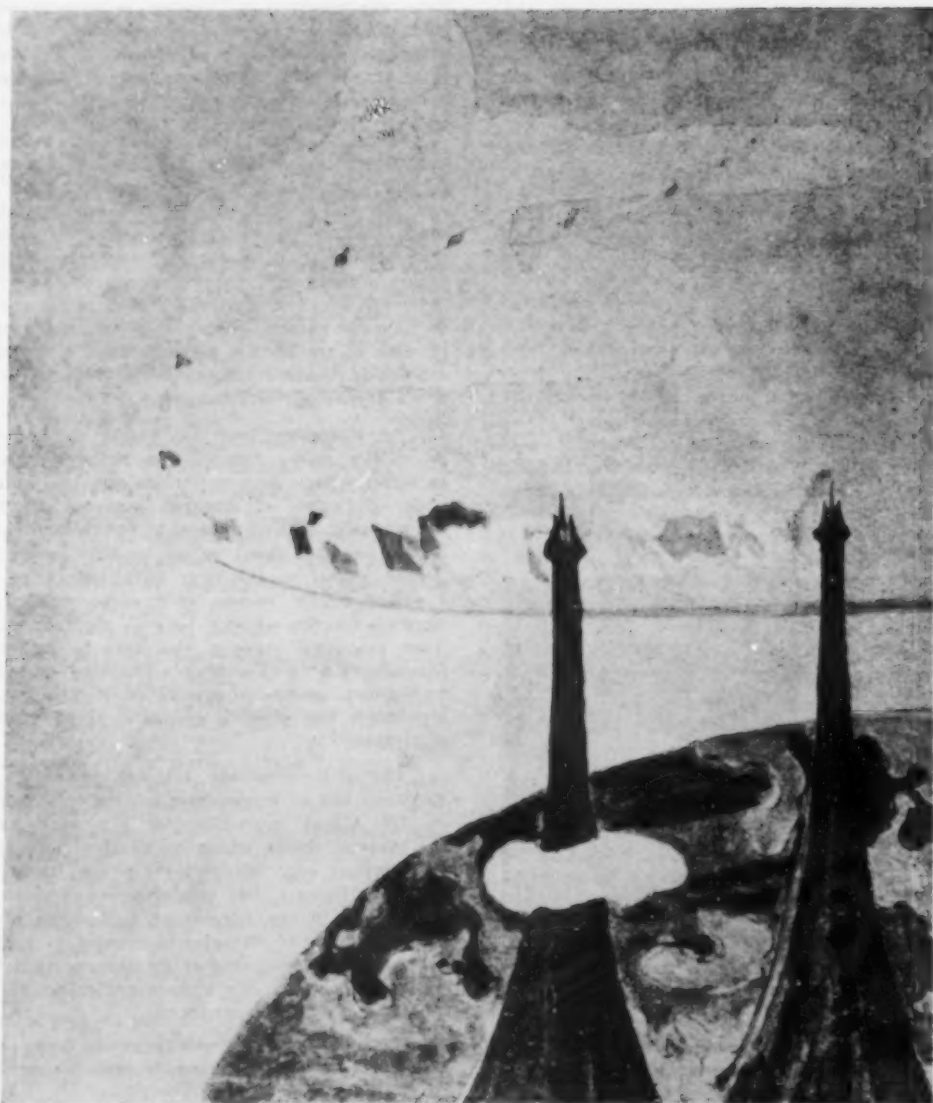
Thus Ciurlionis' art in certain respect is an experimental synthesis of painting and music: an attempt, without doubt an unintentional and a naive one, but still conducted with this semi-conscious regularity which is the always-present singularity of true talent. If this attempt would be a deliberate action prompted by theoretical search for novelty — it hardly would succeed. No branch of art should seek to leave its natural limits. No artist should consciously wish to let his art undergo such a drastic metamorphosis. Such a longing would manifest reflection and a psychology of decadence.

By digressing from the fourth dimension, which is usually called "time", the painting assumes all objects as static and motionless and the motion itself under the gaze of Gorgons becomes petrified into an eternally lasting moment. The kinetic nature of music discloses itself to us in time and makes us forget space. In this way both sisters — the one Painting which knows only space, and the other Music which knows only time — confront each other. This synthesis between the two is metaphysically feasible as a comprehensible harmony of spheres, as harmonious motion of worlds which are full of singing colors and shining sounds — but in art is unrealizable.

Ciurlionis does not attempt to create such a synthesis but he knows how to imply the existence of it. The visual impression for him is equivalent to the musical theme which he develops analogically to the musical one. We remain in the world of form but these forms unfold before us like musical schemes. The image in the mirrors of a fleshless idea either repeats itself and increases in number by bearing new schemes of its own kind or by undergoing a modification and growing into a pure projection of its basic (I would say melodious) form.

Thus the original melody of the image in painting is subject to the thematic development according to the laws of music where the harmonic and variable seek the maximum tension and ultimate disclosure of inherent energy and finally interweave with other themes-images which in their turn move in their musical orbits.

Music and painting are not only opposite to each other but are also uncomformable. Ciurlionis avoided the danger of poorly combining and depriving these two branches of art of their characteristics but he did face the aesthetic antinomy. He had to contemplate the time and space as an inseparable unity, since antinomies are the gates to knowledge — the artist becomes the seer. In art he again limits himself to suggesting such a contemplation — he forces us to find ourselves in space which absorbs time and motion — in space which is a pure strata of vibrating forms.



SONATA OF THE SPRING • FINALE

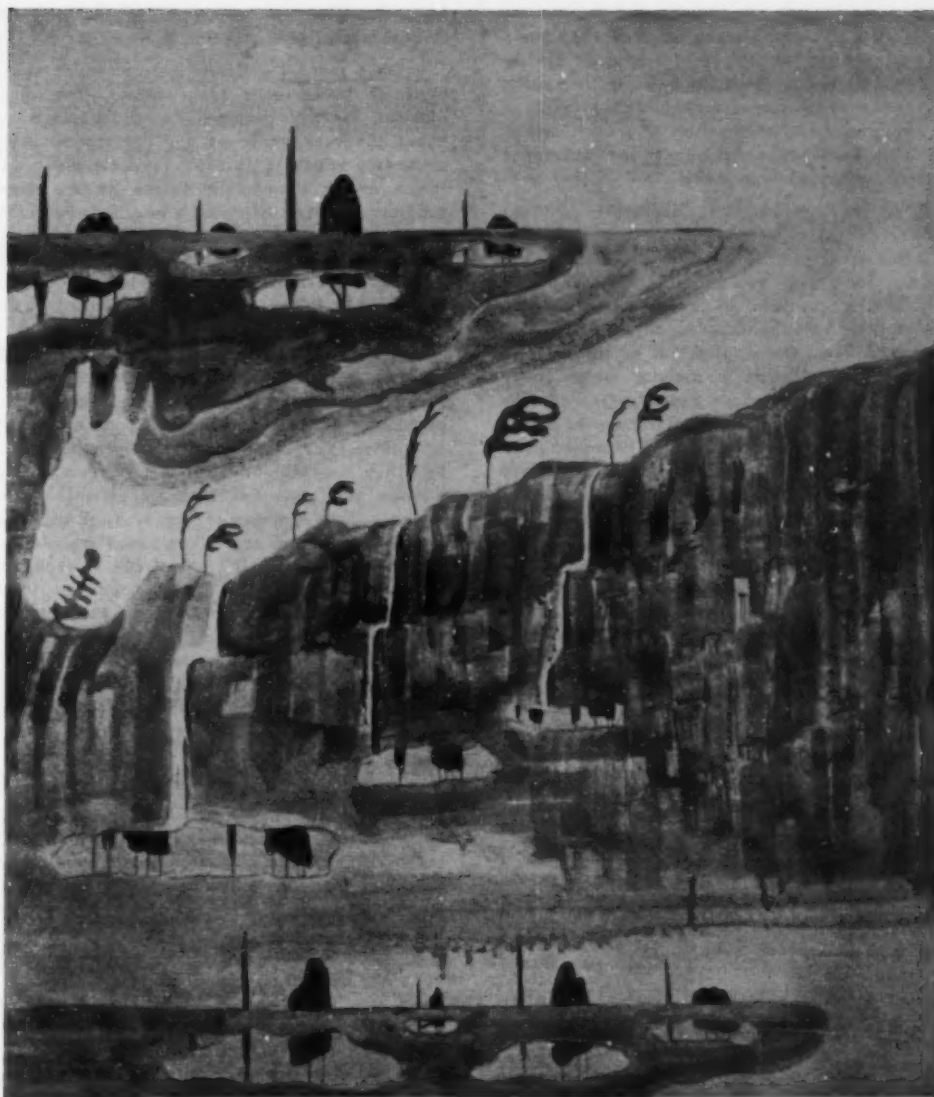
Tempera • 1907

II

The origins of Ciurlionis' creative activity seem to be pure lyricism. When the procedure is fully spontaneous he tries to show us in color how the phenomena of outer world with its fleeting joys and sorrows, premonitions, and reminiscences combine themselves in his subconscious self. He knows how to become for an instant an impressionist and create

simply a landscape veiled in musical mood — maybe a fragile, somewhat bluish wing or tilted drooping dark sail spread over the distant horizon of a city in ruins while a flying away flock in a long breaking line melancholically looms in gloomy skies. This is Ciurlionis' "Sorrow". More often he chooses not only to apply the musical mood, but resorts to his musical method, as follows:

In front of his native Lithuanian village or wood



SONATA OF THE SPRING • ALLEGRO

Tempera • 1907

grows a different hedge of forest, a green hedge of fantastic thorny plants and we see simultaneously the outer world crying for admission into the heart of this lyrical artist. We also see the inner barriers separating him from his native world as though they were mental thorns or pain caused by a wounded heart.

Then again there are the sounds of the blue sea surrounded by rocky giants. In the heart of our

lyric artist in the foreground of his visual sight of the outer world and out of his hymnlike assertion of sunpower spread over blueness and over stony ridges he raises another translucent giant made out of etheric fibres which slightly veil both the sea and the ridges that blossom in the noon skies with the star-like flowers.

Now we have the musical vision of spring. The whole space is covered with white, light melting

Myth is the proof of our participation in God's mystery. Myth is the very thing and, as such it will reveal itself before the judgement of Truth which

It seems as if the artist had in his creative dream the vision of Cosmic Soul — the vague vision of its midday drowsiness where the universe becomes again a chaos, but not the primordial one, no — the musical and unanimous one — where all that has been separated by space and various undercurrents is reunited according to the secret law of intrinsic relationship and conformity. Everything in this world is looking for its counterpart and rejoices over the meeting with the other part — rejoices over the conformity, unification and consonance.

How all one whole harmonious weaves,
Each in the other works and lives!
See heavenly powers ascending and descending,
The golden buckets, one long line, extending!
See them with bliss — exhaling pinions winging
Their way from heaven through earth — their singing
Harmonious through the universe is ringing!

LITUANUS

This echo of a harmonious universe has been to Ciurlionis inseparable from the contemplation of form and color. Like the elfs at the beginning of the second part of the same poem of Goethe, the painter hears where the sun was approaching a mighty noise imperceptible to the human ear. Of course Ciurlionis can understand Ariel's words:

Hearken! hark! the storm of sunrise —
Sounding but to Spirits' ears —
As the Hours fling wide the portals
Of the East, and Day appears.
How the rock-gates, as the chariot
Of the sun bursts through, rebound!
Roll of drum, and wrath of trumpet,
Crashing, clashing, flashing round;
Unimaginable splendour —
Unimaginable sound!
Light is come; and in the tumult,
Sight is deadened — Hearing drowned.

In the bells of flowerets hide,
Or beneath the green leaves glide;
Deeper, deeper in the rock,
Shrink ye from the deafening shock!

(Translated by John Anster)

One cannot without being punished transgress the limits of the humanly possible perception. A likely disaster might be the fate of those who come to the front. The one who dares to cross the border gives to mankind the gift of gifts which can never be reciprocated by grateful posterity. It seems that Ciurlionis overheard the creative conversation of the Cosmic Soul with its initial images, the same as Goethe did:

"Leave now this sacred feast and disperse in all directions. Break with ecstasy through the nearby covers into the spaces of the Universe and fill the whole of it. Being in those unmeasured distances you are the bearers which bring with them the blissful dreams of gods. You already shine with pleiades of stars in cosmic space which is studded with lights. And you mighty comets! you strive always further to distant horizons crossing the labyrinths of suns. Thus, oh, heavenly powers! you take possession of still shapeless worlds, start on them a new creativeness so that they would revive in their measured rotation and overflow with life. By whirling and breaking the ether you carry with you a vigorous blossoming. To the stone's deepest strata you predestine the eternally static form."

Ciurlionis understood the mystery of the archetype about which Goethe says: "No time and no might can destroy the impression of the form, the development of which is its life". The musical insight into the lively unfolding of the forms shows that the archetype develops into the cosmogonic myth. There from comes the magnificent "chaos" realized

in consecutive gradations of creative activity. Here in the break of a clearing sky are the undescrivable waters over the hard surface and there again other waters (not really waters but the primordial moisture containing all future colors or archaic images of future worlds). Here are the translucent star-filled universes, the Holy Spirit in the image of a dove over the flitchering and hazy abyss on the mountain peak like an upside down cone because everything at that stage is subject to the principle of a cone-shaped rotation. All fibres rotate like a widebased open spiral. At the same time the lower abyss already is measured, filled with beginnings of measurement and symmetry, aided by a few dividing, vertical lines.

Time passes and the new perception corresponds to the new world eon. The departed dove is supplanted by a shining Triangle. A bright angel wanders over the clear path of translucent starry sky below which the water flows over and under the rocks like a bridge thrown over a lower abyss where the new formed sphere floats. In the meantime the shadowy Serpent rises from the lower torrents and touches the top like a helpless alternative to an antithesis which heretofore was created and accepted as an antithesis which at the end might blossom out with flowers and evil.

Here we are confronted by the legend of the Serpent — "The Serpent Sonata". The landscape turns green ("Allegro") composed of meadows, waters, imaginary bridges, and viaducts thrown between the planes of illusory perspective. The leading motive of the landscape is the snake-like curve supported by a colonnade motive. The serpent is merely suggested in this mysterious mirrorlike peace. "Andante" follows. Here from a creek circled by natural and artificial barriers a multicolored pillar with a round face (either like a full moon or a Tzar'-Devitza) rises toward the caress of the moonbeam. The other end of the serpent emerges from waters of the bay like a curved beak. The barriers did not stop the worm which came out of the moisture and swiftly moved through the air over the gorges and towers stretched out like a rod with a movable neck. "Scherzo" — three powerful stars are following the worm upward and are lighting up its way with three cone-shaped bright mountains with tunnels which give us the view of different horizons and universes. Three mountain peaks surround the distant worlds like the heads of the Saints with three lights. The same Serpent glides out but it is already translucent as if it were full of light of the three stars. Its head slides from the steep peak toward the tablelike cliff on which lies a vacant king's crown. What is the metaphysical pathos of this strange and horrifying legend told in color but full of melody? Does the artist believe in cosmic theocracy of sex? Allegory contains an idea; symbolic thought wishes to be included. Everybody sees in it what he is able to see.

The center of Ciurlionis' cosmogonic conceptions is the great visionary memory of the Deluge. His

amazing Zodiac is clearly based on the mythological conceptions of this event. His "Sea Sonata" shows the buried and still alive Atlantis in the purple mist of the depths of the ocean. Ark emerges from the moist, glassy surface on a rocky throne. In his painting, "Sundown", the cloud-like animals appear on the edges of endless and seem to be the astral people of the Noah's Ark longing for reincarnation in this new world cleansed by flood. In a row of grandiose visions we are introduced to City's Building of Nations which lasts to the day when the apocalyptic Horse Rider will ride.

All these towers with many terraces similar to Ekbau battlefields full of astrological symbols on the shores of great waters — those colosses, pyramids, spiral towers, pillar-like and man-like rocks, this conglomeration of cyclopean cities, these black suns and the spacing of the horrible fortresses and castles built by the Titans-Magi — all this is perhaps only the delirious raving about the perished Atlantis.

"At that time the world was inhabited by giants, particularly since the time when the sons of God began to seek the daughters of men which bore them children. These children were strong, fine people and God saw how great was the corruption of man on this earth" (Genesis, chapter 6).

IV

"Everyone would like to disappear individually in order to find himself again in the infinity" says Goethe and of course Ciurlionis was one of those who thought the same way. However the human being cannot overturn his individuality, at least not during his life time. The one who, in his enthusiasm and ecstasy, meditates over the symbol of Macrocosm immediately exclaims: "What a spectacle! But, Alas! it is only a spectacle! How can I embrace thee — Oh! boundless nature? Where am I going to find the divine bosom, the source of all life? Heaven clings to you and the earth and the aging human soul long for you too. You are wasteful with life, you provide the whole universe and I am the only one who longs for you in vain."

No contemplation, no insight can gratify the longing of the human heart. "What need have I for all the mysteries and revelations if I do not have love?" asks the Apostle. Any reflection and revelation remain to be ideals if they are not animated by the sole and true realism — the realism of love. Love helped Ciurlionis to contemplate fearlessly utmost chaos with an inner harmony. But the hugeness of the celebrated chaos was too great for the artist. It moved against his soul like a might unable to penetrate and make clair-sentient his most visionary genius. It seemed that this gigantic imaginary structure could fall down any instant. Already the splinters were falling on his soul like heavy waves or blocks of icy cliffs. The dark suns were rising; the bell in cloudy, stormy mistiness sounded the tocsin over the enraged abyss. The whole universe of the

cosmic contemplation and audibility threatened to attack the soul of the daring man and to bury him in the ruins of madness.

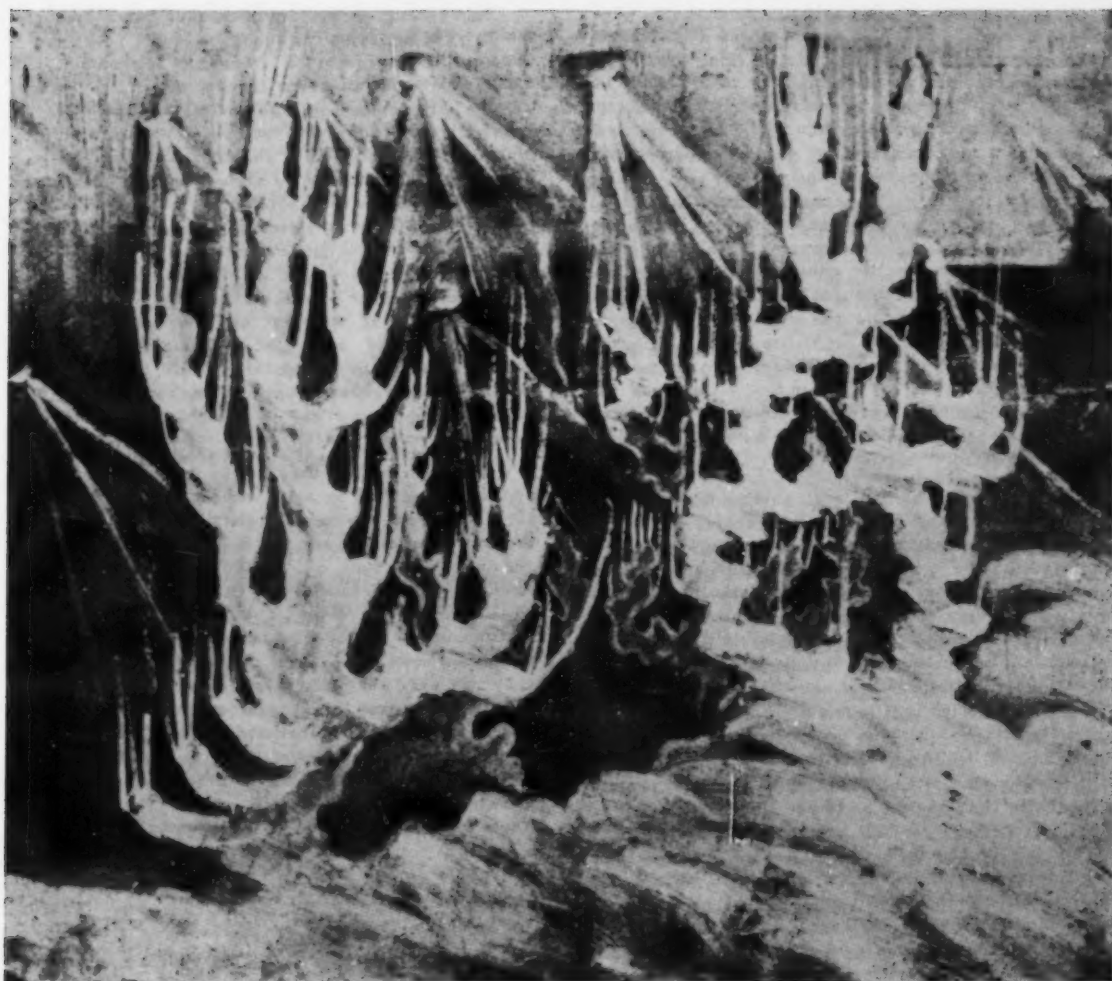
The radiant king is sitting on the throne, his feet resting in a lower material sphere; his hands rest in another which includes the first one. Nine suns are rising from these regions, each meant for its own paradise. The king's shoulders rest on a border of a still higher sphere where the angels live. Behind this radiant king there is a suggestion of another one, wearing a similar but dark crown. He presides in the depth of the new sky where there shines a great new sun and a great new moon. Beyond that, the artist sees nothing and perhaps knows nothing. Is there in those heights an all embracing king which we see on the canvas — another one, not dark but dazzlingly white, sitting on shapeless throne?

•

The search for cosmic reality, the longing for and anticipation of universal love, the demanding of this love, all are the integral parts of religion. Should Ciurlionis be not a religious man all his creative work would have been only "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals". What more — there would not be any creativity or anticipation. The awakened chaos would submerge and obfuscate everything. If we take separate aspects of Ciurlionis' art we will see that he is guided by religion. We can find *Te Deum* in his "Hymn" which is woven together from the sun's beams and songs of gold. We can see sombre valleys of his purgatory covered with hellish flora, but over them is a faraway mystic temple erected on the head of an infernal animal-like cliff. In two hands helplessly raised in prayer, in the coldness of dim, empty, nocturnal skies, we overhear the artist's lamentation *de profundis*; "I believe, help my unbelief".

The basic motive of all creative expression of Ciurlionis' religiosity is the motive of ascension. This untiring spirit, obedient to the eternal hearts of "Sursum", enables his pointed cliffs, the pyramids, stairways, aerial galleries and tops of steeples to pierce through all the layers both visible and invisible. In his "City" I somehow see the final accord of the uninterpreted prayer of his heart. After all it is not a city, it is rather a sort of *Monsalvat* or, if it is a city, it is God's City — *Civitas Dei*. Will there be so few chosen ones that there will be room for all in this sharp-cupoled monastery which crowns the pointed cone of the mountain? Behind these inaccessible fences are the gates which, if they should open, would yawn over the steep precipice into an invisible abyss. The artist found his way even over the abyss. Did not the swan's wings of music convey him to the holy mountain?

The most precious essence in an artist of genius is that he breathes God. His breath is full of God, full of life, and of the Spirit's grace. "The Spirit" flows as it pleases and nobody can tell where the Spirit comes from and to where it goes. The highly



FROM THE CYCLE "WINTER"

Tempera • 1907

spirited magnanimous artist is full of God's ideas and by breathing them out he manifests the eternal aims hidden in the transient masks of universe. Let us therefore learn to fill our breath with the Only One as Ciurlionis did and nothing in this exalted artist will seem mysterious to us.

One of Ciurlionis' spheres becomes transparent and in front of us we see the Bride. She is sitting on an aetheric throne, woven from sunny threads. We can hardly see her — the skies are full of light and joy ("Hymn")... This was the way Ciurlionis created his own universe. In this way, too, Chaos gives life to the Star.

V

Ciurlionis, first of all, I would say, is a lonely man. Not lonely in the externally-biographical sense and also not only in the psychological sense; he is lonely because of his place in the contemporary culture and also because of his intermediate position between various branches of art.

There is no doubt that Ciurlionis is a musician. He is one not thanks to his special musical education, for he did not produce anything new or important in music, but the musical element seems to fill his inner self and concentrate chiefly, strange as it may

seem, on centers of his visual perceptions. The energy of myth, melody or harmony were in Ciurlionis always ready to become active and created a medium where his "I" contacted the external world, where his "ego" grasped and comprehended this world and blended it with his inner world. At the same time he was not a musician, because music did not prevail over him as an independent, original sphere outside of universe. It was not a separate sphere subject to him, or a region of free objectivization as of a creative spirit. Music was necessary to him in order to keep in touch with the universe because the loss of such a contact threatened him with mania. Not he became "objectified" in the music but, thanks to the music, the world did actualize in him. He did not create music, but music in him created visions. Still, each breath of his was music — so that the outer world could have disappeared for him and music would have remained in him as long as his inner world existed.

Has Ciurlionis been a real painter indeed? The artists who use the brush most probably would be perplexed. Some may praise him as a colorist, or they may find that he is a "creator of beauty", or a refined landscape artist, or an extraordinary inventor of decorative motives. They all appreciate his original approach in presenting the material world, the airiness, relationship of spaces, and finally, the impression of his stylistic eclecticism, a specific unsteadiness in taste. They declare that in his paintings, in the strict sense, he did not achieve anything new or durable. Some amazed by the novelty of his aesthetic conception (such as the attempt to combine the spacial categories with that of time or to present drawings as an etheric scheme), would more energetically insist on his importance in painting. Others, because they would not be able to prove that it is possible to continue in his footsteps would ascribe to his work only normative value. This would be decisive for further striving. On the contrary still others might argue that the technical innovations attributed to Ciurlionis are only the result of his yearnings to use the painting for expressing the phantasmogories of his imagination and thus his problematic works are simply "literature".

The last category would give to the mystics and poets the right to interpret Ciurlionis' work and become inspired by it. The mystics would say, as usually, that their interpretation was authoritative in any way. Poets responsible to the nature and laws existing for the literary art entrusted to them would resolutely decline the offer mentioned above, declaring that the work of the visionary thinker cannot be expressed or measured with words... Thus Ciurlionis, according to the stern verdict of the judges from the Aeropagus of arts would not find for himself a place in any of them and indeed would not know where to find his locus. Therefore the artist who is unable to find for himself a place in arts becomes an exile in the world of culture. This homelessness is what we called earlier the cultural loneliness.

Such lonely artists are more and more frequent. The great Nietzsche belonged to them: was he a philosopher? a poet? a renegade philologist? a musician without music? a founder of religion without religion? He cooped in the *civitas literarum* as an "aphorist" i.e. a thinker "without alliances" and unreliable because of his anarchic intellect. In our country Tyutchev predicted arrival of such artists and addressed them with the following words: "There is a whole world of mysteriously magic thoughts in your soul." He also gave them advice: "Only know how to live in yourself". The hermits with their thaumaturgic inner world are happiest when protected by the law of muteness of Tyutchev's *Silentium*: "Be silent, hide and conceal your thoughts and dreams". He deeply feels the truth of the words: "By blasting you will perturb the springs — feed on them and keep silent — listen to them and keep silent".

What all these artists tell us is only fragmentary and accidental. It is said without premeditation. In our incoherent cultural society, deprived of God, the most successful are the individual quasi-religions, the most spiritual of which are called arts and sciences. These replace the great single one which is lost to us — religion. The lonely ones whom we talk about — these spiritual anarchists of the contemporary culture — are deeply irreligious because they not only shamelessly offend each of our quasi-religions but they also, together with their contemporaries, have lost the all-connecting Great Religion. There is no doubt that they wish to reestablish it but not by a joint effort and, in any case, without the knowledge and participation of the contemporaries. Their relationship to the quasi-religions is so blasphemous that both the frank and the concealed renegades will never obtain the forgiveness for their treachery. Trying to exploit art and sciences they do not wish to serve any of them.

The lonely ones are the prodigal sons in each house until they leave it forever. The house abandoned is Paternal House which they remember only vaguely and to which they do not find their way back. For this reason, probably, their own kin do not accept the prophet and as long as he lives in the Paternal House, he himself is like a wolf looking into the woods. His tendency is not to add to the household but to squander the family's property, but in the end the prophet will leave his family for his real Paternal House. For the lonely one there is only one way given — to become a spiritual wanderer.

VI

How do the lonely ones intend to take advantage of their home and make use of the cultural surroundings which they are supposed to augment and the inner truth and holiness of which they insult with their sacrilege and betrayal? They have the need to express their inner experiences. The glittery stars which rise and set in their emotional depths are

too serene. It is impossible to admire them silently as Tyutchev, himself a poet of mental reservations and hints, advises. There is an urge in them to communicate all their inner experiences to the outer world. Universality craves for the entirety. Super-individual concept cannot be compressed into the confines of individual concept. Even the ancient thinkers claimed that the inner experiences of an individual cannot be communicated to others. Our time marked by its tension of energies of immanent cognition senses very painfully this inexpressibility of our vision and the falsehood of the spoken word. Here is the reason why in our time the citadels of rationalism are being destroyed so easily one after another.

Thus the intercultural situation of the lonely ones can be justified as far as they do express the individual's inner experience which, does not fit into the existing divisions of different spheres or art. Indeed, each of these fields of art connects and unifies the inner experience of the artists in such a manner that there is no possibility for the seclusion of the artist as the one mentioned above. Such a constraint happens because the separate trends become formalistic tendencies, concentrated around one common isomorphic center which, in this case, is the basic law for the branch of art in question and this law again is being interpreted as a creative category of forms.

It is typical for the lonely ones to wish to direct their emotional experiences differently. They have the centrifugal desire to escape from the solar system of their luminaries into the space without any form and not yet populated, in Goethe's sense, with the spirits of forms. Here each of the lonely ones would like to become the demiurge and the significant center of energetics of the new world. As we still live in a world of three dimensions, five senses, and of maybe solved, but impenetrable and forced upon us, categories of space and time, and because during many thousands of centuries tireless and creative mankind discovered and created new vistas of beauty and at the same time measured and indicated its limits just like Bach measured and limited the musical element with his "Wohltemperiertes Klavier", the centrifugal tendencies of isolated artists accidentally carried them, not into a void where new world forms could be founded, but into the neighbouring solar systems to please the nearby Muses and create ambiguous art forms which are not in artibus but inter artes.

The above explains the phenomena so much spoken about lately, and even more secretly being dreamt of — the so-called "synthesis of arts". The negative interpretation of this phenomena is the proof that our creative and perceiving faculties become weaker. That being somewhat senile in our weariness we are in need of the most refined excitement, accumulation of impressions, something barbarically refined, such as the combination of enjoyments we receive from music, poetry, animated sculp-

ture, colors and smells. But let us stop at these deviations of nihilistic aesthetics, the secret intention of which, is to lure the golden and fleecy Muse, to bring her into the sphere of sensual materiality and gross sensualization. The solution of all this is the disbelief in the reality of the golden ethereal throne.

We have to do with other phenomena — with the loneliness of the best of the human race not, only in contemporary culture, but in the historical, everlasting culture. The origin of these spiritual comets indicates the convulsion of the unknown foetus in the womb of the Universal Soul. This spiritual individual walks in this world as if slightly foolish carrying unconsciously the news about the birth of the future which will belong to the spirit only.

From this point of view the martyrdom of these wanderers is of greatest value. We are not always aware that every motion in our personal and social life depends on our relation, conscious or unconscious, toward the mysteries of the universe. From time to time we hear the news in our seven gated Thebes, the walls of which are so familiar to us that we do not know any longer, and do not believe any longer, that they were created by the lyre, that, in not far away valleys, settled the singing Sphinx. He threatens to destroy everything and to ask the riddles. We see that our youth, one after another goes into the mountains to try his luck and solve the riddle or perish. All they want is to save the city and to expel the monster by solving the asked riddle. Still much stronger than the most noble intention is the attraction of the enchanting mystery. What else can the city do than to pay highest honors to the lifeless body saved from eagles which live in the deserted foothills where also lives the invisible Sphinx? Before the seven-gated Thebes to which these heroes were supposed to serve but deserted their posts — they are the guilty ones — and still they are ready to take onto themselves the sin of the city.

So we are confronted with irreconcilable contradiction, with the aesthetic "aporia". The inner experience of the artist is placed outside of his art. The only way he can express his art is by his art's indicatory power.

Life solves such contradictions by moving one art toward the nearest one which brings into the synthetic creation new methods of working that are suitable to express more intensely the inner vision. As a result, the vision remains without finding the suitable expression but the action has already taken place. The celestial body got off its axis, fell off from the orbit of its solar system.

Our contemporary culture resembles a stadium where the chariot on a sudden turn breaks the pole and smashes into pieces. The axis burns and the wild horses drag the coachman carrying away the remains of the chariot into the fields. Here and there in comet-like zigzags glitter the chariots in the rolling dust. A mysterious change common to all of us is the symbol of our times — a change in the very perception of

existing values and fundamentals of our spiritual life, the Essential sensation of human ego "I" and the essential perceptivity of everything material. It is not strange therefore that the most sensitive and audacious ones experience within them the displacement of the above mentioned axis on which the healthy human being rotates. As compared by Plato: like an astral body making circles predestined by the harmony of spheres.

But I always believe in you
Oh Lyre of sun,
Whose murmur accompanying the songs of Aonids
is vibrating in the depth of ether
To a perfect measure,
And building a rebellious world,
And the sea is wailing,
And a sword is ringing hitting a sword.
One axis is breaking after another
Near to the turning point:
Aren't this the restless comets
Clashing in the fields,
And there is somewhere a golden gate opening,
And a flock of dear swans
Is calling in the skies.

VII

Let us drop the dithyrambs and rather soberly look at the situation of an artist. We see that nature and the inherited laws of his chosen art limit him in expressing his inner experiences. We consider such solution, having in mind the attempt to combine various arts as aesthetically groundless. Such amalgamation violates the sacred rights of each of the interfused arts. In this way the coalescence of two art domains commits double, of three threefold betrayal. From each art is being taken away only a part and none is presented as a whole.

Still we can see a possible way out. There are namely two ways. The first is the exactly comprehended intuitive symbolism. The principle of symbols does not change the very substance of art and is in accord with any techniques or any manner. Any intuition, any insight into the essence of realities can, with help of the principle of symbols, be substantiated into its entity, into the more inferior realities. Of course the artist must be able to see the more inferior realities in correct correlation with the superior ones.

The second way is the magic one in the positive sense of this word. It is adjacent to the first, can easily blend with it but differs from it as much as the direct mystical sensation of the heart of matter considering its relationship to the universe from the standardized hierarchical contemplation of the same matter does. The second way is the aspiration of feeling from within the constituent elements of the given art, and of discovering in them the cosmic archebasis of essentiality. Now the world of the poet becomes to us the live energy, the creative fiat,

the provoking idea, the connecting and the discharging power. Now the sound for the ear of the musician becomes the true universal tension carrying the waves of willpower. Now the human body opens itself to the sculptor as if it only would be cover of an intrinsic "aetheric" order and rhythm. Then before the artist discloses itself an "astral" sub-basis of all visible phenomena and impression of tangible perceptibility appears. Scriabin approached music this way.

In any case, should the artist remain truthful to his art, which is supposed to represent the intangibly visible, he will express on his canvases all he himself perceives, the intangible just as well as the visible.

Even if the musical element innerly alienates Ciurlionis from the principles of painting, the element of imagery in it is pure, not exposed to the external aesthetic transformation — form is of extreme importance and value for the painting and certainly the art as such will know how to appreciate it.

What remains is to reach the final conclusion. The attempt to synthesize the different branches of art that we observe in the work of Ciurlionis from the attempt to make use of the arts to be interfused as serviceable media helping to reach the goal placed outside the limits of these same arts. During this process the specific nature of each of arts is violated and the artist's relationship toward them loses its entirety and, therefore these experiments cannot be considered as legitimate.

Does, then the truthful devotion to the art permit the artist to subordinate its entire and innerly intangible organism to something superior to it. In our days of superficial aesthetics many may say "by no means". Still, during all past centuries in the history of art such subordination of one art to the other was proclaimed and practiced. The eternal problem of art is Man and his Mystery. Only what already became of Man thanks to art can determine what will become of him in the future. All the visible world around us is only a part of Man. Around the divine image of Man, around Dionysus and Apollo dance in a ring the Muses unmasked by the human being Orpheus. But Man gives the best of himself to God. Therefore, when Man dedicated his art to the divine services, each of the Muses cheerfully whispered: "I am God's servant". For art is Spouse and in all arts lives and breathes a sole spouse — the Soul of the Universe. In the divine services all Muses joined in a harmonious choir full of inspiration. Aleksandr Veselovski perceived the from time immemorial "syncretic procedure" the cradle of arts which later became independent: drama, lyrics, epos, orchestration and music. In this "syncretic procedure" already existed naturally and with no effort the synthesis for which we now search with such a rationalistic imagination.

The creator of Palefal and Scriabin were fully aware that such a synthesis could exist only in a liturgical sense. Let us look at the divine services of the present day. All arts are represented and even,

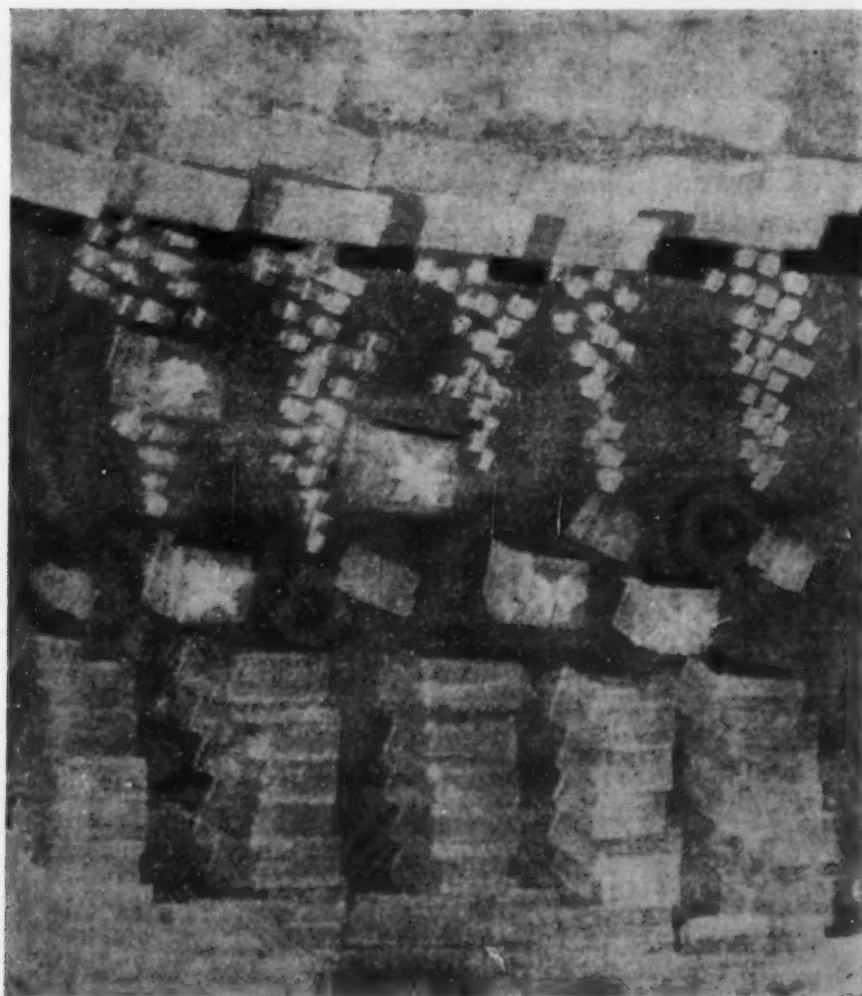
more than that. We find here also the sensually agreeable: aroma and the art which Mother-Nature considers to be her privilege and which she yields to her heir — the Man. It is the art of faceting the crystals and the coloring of precious stones. Here are the doors in the altarscreen — three doors of the tragic stage of the Hellenes. Here is the solea — the proscenium and the archbishop's place, and here is the themelia for the orchestra. We also have the two half-choirs following the ancient custom. The strophes and antistrophes resound antiphonally. The priests move in their precious stoles; in the recitatives and singing echoes the hymnical magnificence of Hellenic poetry. The frescos glimmer through the etheric texture of the bluish fimiā like visions from the impalpable but visible world. In radiance of endless flaming lights the pearls change and glitter like the night full of ancient mysteries. Gold and

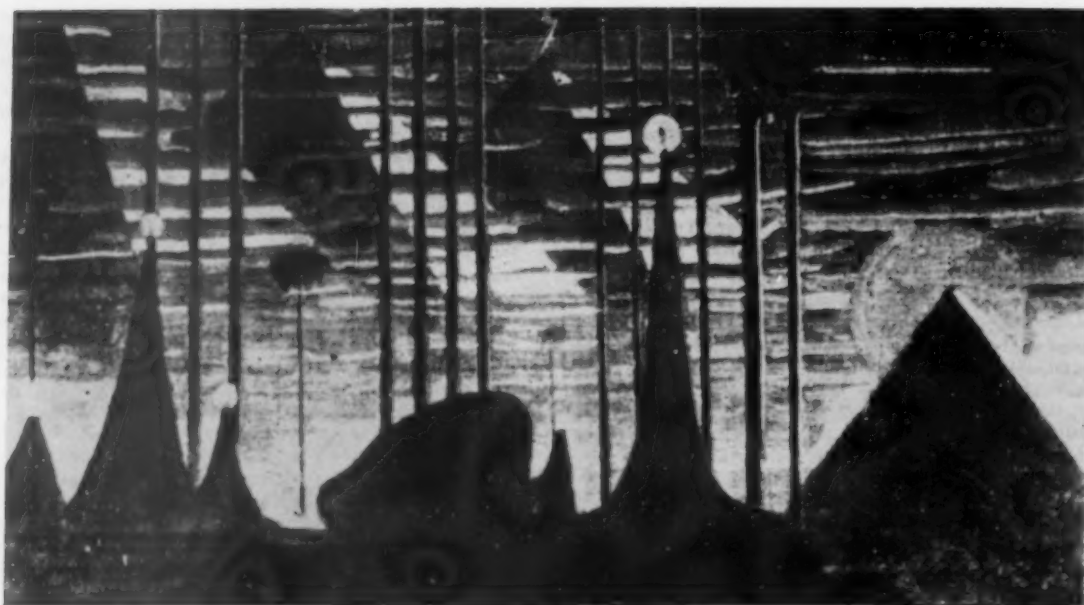
silver from the royal treasuries are all scattered in front of us. Sculpture — did it not bloom with its most beautiful blossoms in churches? It is only in the divine service that the arts remain on their axes. Each of the arts rotates on its own axis and follows its own orbit.

Our time is the time of dislocation of all axes. Thus, the arts have lost their ground. Next problem for a painter is to relocate each art into the sphere of its regular rotation on an immovable axis. As for the problem of the synthesis of arts which really is in accord with the newly born all-universal perceptibility — that is a problem of the distant future, indeed the highest and most remote one. Its name is Mystery. The problem of solving this Mystery is the occumenical dilemma of the Mystery to come just as well as it is the problem of our own life in religion to come.

FROM THE CYCLE
"WINTER"

Tempera • 1907





A PART OF THE SONATA OF PYRAMIDS

Tempera • 1908

"Ciurlionis! The name brings back all my childhood! I was seeing him, passing like a shadow always deep in thoughts. And I was dreaming to be like him. I knew that he was a painter, that he was a musician, I knew all his family. I knew his father, the organist of the church, whom I questioned often about his son, not daring to approach Ciurlionis himself, always so withdrawn. The father would advise me not to follow the example of his son, that would not lead to any good for me.

I was often in his house on the shore of the lake Druskonė where my father had built a beautiful house for one of the notables of our town. I saw the paintings of Ciurlionis which fascinated me, but I was too young to really appreciate them. Now I remember

that I liked very much his Lithuanian cemeteries, so full with mystery.

Concerning his dream about the synthesis of all arts, I think that his dream was realized in the past in the great temples, cathedrals and palaces, where what is due to the eye belongs to the domain of the eye, and what is due to the ear belongs to the ear, but together form the majestic accord which is the real synthesis of the arts.

What is certain is that Ciurlionis was a real genius. And I am proud to have been born in the village whose grounds were touched by his footsteps. Our dear, our unforgettable Druskininkai!"

JACQUES LIPCHITZ
(From a letter to Aleksis Rannit, 1961)

THE COSMIC ART OF M. K. ČIURLIONIS

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS PAINTING "REX"

by RAYMOND F. PIPER

Čiurlionis, "the real father of abstract painting" (Louise Janin) and "the first abstract painter of modern times" (Aleksis Rannit), is emphatically cosmic in experience and in art; also he is musicalistic, symbolistic, and synthetic. He lived and painted pantheism, engendered by: (1) his communion with nature: with the expansive, mystic beauty of his native landscape; (2) a study of Oriental philosophy, especially Hindu, and of astronomy, mathematics, psychology, etc.; (3) his conviction that "music is the metaphysical substratum of everything" (Nikolaj Woroblow). Čiurlionis neither imitated nor combated nature, but loved and revealed her, and freely borrowed images from her most sublime aspects.

He was born in Varėna, and his life span was 1875 to 1911. A musical genius, he studied and composed successfully in the Warsaw Conservatory. When he could not totally express his pantheistic experiences in music, he suffered a mental depression. Then in 1905 he discovered the wonders of light and color, and resolutely became a painter. In the Warsaw Academy of Art he discovered that the academic drawing of busts and other exercises were so hopelessly remote from his need of expressing the life energies of the world that in a few days he deserted the Academy in disgust, and committed himself to arduous self-training. He had only six years to paint the superabundant, upsurging visions of cosmic reality before madness and death destroyed his sensibility in 1911. Most of his surviving works (200 paintings and 80 drawings) are State-owned, in the Čiurlionis Art Museum in Kaunas, Lithuania. Because of cheap materials, his paintings have steadily faded, before the world knew their creator.

His profound musical knowledge kept inspiration simmering in his subconsciousness. If nature is basically musical, he thought, the spirit of music should infuse all the arts. But how join time to space in an art like painting? Čiurlionis' answer to the seeming impossible was his unique discovery: sonata or cyclic painting. The idea produced aesthetically convincing results.

He packed temporal unfoldment into his paintings in two ways: (1) he developed a complex idea or emotion through four stages or sections of a

symphony-like movement. He gave musical names to the parts, as in the Sonata of the Sun: Allegro, Andante, Scherzo, Finale. He tied every sonata to reality by a name, such as Sonata of: Sea, Springtime, Serpent, or Stars. (2) In designing individual paintings, he applied the principle of counterpoint: parallel bands of colors might unfold like concurrent musical melodies. Note, for example, the sweeping bundle of curves at the top of *Rex*. Rhythm proves to be a principle for unifying all the arts.

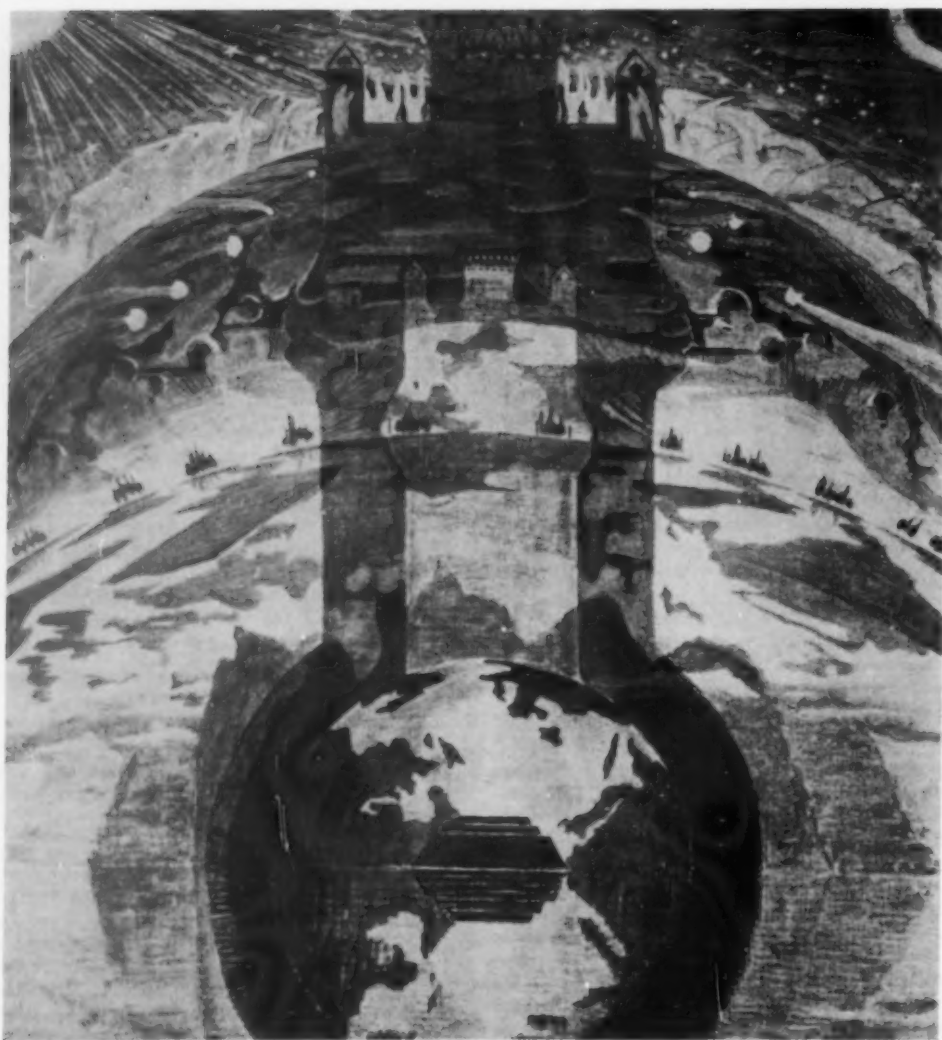
Thus Čiurlionis joined music and painting in a grand accord, not by correspondence of tones and colors, but by analogies of structural design. This idea of symphonic painting, new in art history, proved wonderfully effective in expressing the vast cosmic harmonies and unfoldments which the artist always felt existed in the universe.

Painter Čiurlionis proceeded like a musical composer, and realized the true destiny of abstract art; namely, the combination of four factors: (a) the selection or abstraction of form components for design; (b) the urge, adoption, and development of a thematic factor; (c) harmonious composition, including unifying and expressive colors; and (d) the ever-present, commanding, emotive, constructing mind of the free artist.

Thus this artist integrated freedom and order, the primitive and the scientific, the musical and the mystical, the human and the abstract. Such an integral, self-focused art evidently realizes richer human significance than do the geometric or accidental varieties of abstraction.

The painting, *Rex*, is a cosmic landscape that is at once decorative, monumental, metaphysical, and majestic. The artist dared to paint a symbol of the total universe. "Ecstatically the artist loses himself in the cosmos and sings his joy in rhythmic, prismatic movements." (Rannit).

Mrs. Valerija Čiurlionytė-Karužienė, Conservator of the Čiurlionis Museum, describes her experience of *Rex* and adds, that "Other observers may meet entirely different experiences. *Rex*, to me, is a synthesis of emotion and of mind. Vitalizing flames erupt from the depths of the earth. With destructive



REX

Tempera • 1909

force they penetrate through the earth's globe and expand into the Cosmos. In the heavens above these forces receive the visual form of Rex, Whom with His potential, the creative forces of Genius, brings meaning, brightness, and order into the universe. The bright flames eliminate darkness and subdue the aggressively destructive forces."

The colors of Rex are soft and tapestry-like, a blend of the three colors the artist successively used: green, dark lilac, and red.

Another interpretation follows. The earth seems

to spread out into an immense spherical ocean, on the rim of which move mechanically the ships of the world. Out of the earth ascend a pair of forms that suggest the Pillars of Hercules, which the ancients supposed to be the limits of the habitable globe. Above these pillars spreads out a massive, whirling arc. One who knows the Psalms of David would take this winglike form as the arms of the protecting God who embraces the universe. One band of the arc consists of buzzing shooting-stars, moons, and bomb-like balls. (Ciurlionis suffered mental distress

from his insistent precognition of world destruction). The brightest band is made of interweaving, undulating angelic figures. The sky includes the artist's favorite symbol, the sun, emblem of God. Rex could be called The Throne of God. It is Čiurlionis' most magnificent pronouncement of pantheism, of his conviction that the world is full of Divinity. "Under the aspect of a vast melody, Čiurlionis elevates us to a state of cryptic spirituality without parallel in art." (Rannit).

Aleksis Rannit affirms, "It is not the bare artistic form but his innermost declaration which makes him a great painter. He demonstrates thus that the highest quality of an artistic work is its inner form: a spiritual substance, a metaphysical essence, a mystic ingredient of existence, some divine dispenser of life." The Russian philosopher-poet-critic, Vyacheslav Ivanov, says, "For the cosmic and transcendental feeling of things, the work of Čiurlionis has attained a weighty significance for the history of the art of the future" (Quoted by Rannit).

A cycle of fourteen works, Creation of the World, and Constellations of the Zodiac, twelve, are two complex creations which are rich in cosmic implications. The reproduction of Allegro of the Sonata of the Sun is the first lively component which is

characteristic of a musical sonata with four components of contrasting moods and keys. The soft, shimmering, interpenetrating lights are largely lost in the black-white reproduction. The painting (about 1908) expresses the artist's feeling in his mature years when Nature is no longer represented in details but as a mysterious, luminous whole. Its delicate tones suggest the infinity of light and the mood of a brooding mysticism, a pantheistic tranquility.

At this time too he loved monumental forms and climbing decoration. The leading motif enters the dark gate below and becomes a succession of dancing, ascending suns which repeat the thematic measure as a typical sonata does. The strange winged figure, hovering overhead, is reminiscent of the dove of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, and nearby is the distant gate to another world.

The composition keeps us aware of movement in time: through a rhythmic procession the sun appears in many positions. The work may thus also symbolize the migrating lights of an inward or spiritual universe.

(The painting, tempera on canvas, called Rex, is dated 1909, and is 147 x 133 cm. in size. It is owned by the Čiurlionis Museum of Art in Kaunas).

IGOR STRAWINSKY ON ČIURLIONIS

Igor Strawinsky became acquainted with the art of Čiurlionis in 1907 and was deeply impressed by it. Around 1908 Strawinsky acquired a painting of Čiurlionis, thus becoming one of the earliest collectors of the works of the Lithuanian artist. The fate of this painting — part of the cyclic work called "Sonata of the Pyramids" — is described in the following letter of the composer to Aleksis Rannit, July 19, 1961:

... I can only tell you that the very beautiful painting of M. K. Čiurlionis you are speaking about was lost with all my belongings in Russia during the communist revolution in 1917. I acquired it in 1908 (or 1909) and I never had a reproduction of it. It is also not easy to describe this flight of a growing up rows of pyramids toward the horizon, which was the subject of this powerful painting. I often think about this loss with a deep regret ...

M. K. ČIURLIONIS

THE COMPOSER

by VLADAS JAKUBENAS

History of the arts is not lacking in examples of exceptionally creative individuals who change their field of endeavor more than once before soaring to yet unseen heights in some one medium. History has also known artists who, while unsurpassed in their chosen field, kept alive a second talent, often unknown to the public, overshadowed by their own brilliance, yet strong and original. Chopin, for example, could have become known for his talent in caricature; J. S. Bach was prominent in mathematics; Borodin spent much of his time on chemistry! M. K. Čiurlionis belongs among these few and precious examples of versatility.

The son of an organist, Čiurlionis was playing the piano at the age of five. A few years later he had already mastered various other instruments and was composing polonaises and mazurkas for the private orchestra of Duke Oginski who had taken the talented child to his estate. Satisfied with the steady progress of his protégé, Duke Oginski gave him a scholarship and sent him to study at the conservatory of Warsaw. There Čiurlionis followed the regular course of studies designed for composers and was enrolled in the composition course of prof. Noskovski.

Warsaw at that time was still steeped in the romantic cult of Chopin and Čiurlionis' early compositions show this. However, his own style tends to be more severe, more firm, especially in the smaller compositions. Sometimes the thought suggests itself that he may have been familiar with the early Scriabin, though Čiurlionis lacks Scriabin's ecstatic characteristics and is more composed, pensive, melancholic, mystical.

The quality of Čiurlionis' first compositions in Warsaw — pieces for the piano, many short preludes, sonatas — is uneven. Some preludes cater to the popular taste, though here and there appear gems of unmistakable originality. The main mood is deeply melancholic and full of yearning. Notable is his liking for the "basso ostinato"—repetitive bass figures. This tendency will persist and will be used to full advantage in later work. Among the early romantic pieces should be mentioned the prelude in F flat, melancholic and dramatic, which has received lasting popularity with concert audiences. Another favorite, the outstanding short prelude in A minor, is interesting because of national motives which are rare in the early Čiurlionis. Also noteworthy are the longer piano pieces: "The Autumn" full of disquieting unrest; the "Our Father" which communicates in strange chro-

matic harmony a mood of sad, deep prayer; the "De Profundis", a cantata for choir and orchestra.

Having finished his studies at the conservatory of Warsaw, Čiurlionis remained there for a time. There he composed his first major work—the symphonic poem "The Forest" with which he took first prize in the Zamojski contest.

"The Forest" is for a full orchestra. In form it is a free fantasy, even though it has themes and developments. The composition begins in a bright C major, the strings create the rustling of the forest. Out of the lively but dreamlike music slowly emerge countermotives which are developed polyphonically. The middle part—"andante espressivo e cantabile"—is not contrasting; it stays in the same brightly colored lyricism. At the beginning of the second part there arises a beautiful melody having Lithuanian folk nuances. Then follows a broad development of the themes, partly returning to earlier motives; the music grows in exaltation until it reaches again the stately C major. The composition ends in majestic C major chords.

"The Forest", although somewhat too long, is a unified composition. The harmony is still uncomplicated, but the simple techniques are used artfully. The feeling for orchestral tone color is evident. The style shows the influence of the romantic atmosphere prevalent at the Warsaw conservatory, and a slight echo of Wagner. "The Forest" continues to be one of the better Lithuanian symphonic compositions of that period. It has been recorded by Deutsche Gramophon GmbH, with Städtisches Orchester, Berlin under the direction of Vytautas Marijošius.

New perspectives came into the life of Čiurlionis in 1901 when, with the financial support and encouragement of Duke Oginski, he left to further his studies at Leipzig. The vigorous, strict mood at the conservatory of Leipzig was a radical contrast to the dreamy, sentimental atmosphere of Warsaw. Čiurlionis welcomed the change. Sentimentality and Chopin's romanticism make way for more serious compositions, more complicated, full of sudden modulation, contrapuntal, tending towards new intricacies. The tendency for polyphony which had been discernible even in his earliest compositions, now came into full power. Contrapuntal fugues, fuguettes, canons became numerous. Čiurlionis studied counterpoint with Jadasohn, composition with Reinecke. The talent of the young composer did not remain unnoticed: his compositions were included in conservatory concerts and were favorably received both by the professors and by professional musicians.

Having finished his studies in Leipzig, Čiurlionis spent some time in Poland, Russia and Lithuania earning his living by private music lessons. He was ready to profit from his years of musical training and on the verge of launching into mature composing when his life took an unexpected turn. He became a painter.

Although Čiurlionis had always shown talent for painting he had done little about it. As if to make up for lost time he now concentrated all his efforts on this new love which had for so long been latent. He still composed occasionally but he had little time — these compositions seem sketchy, some were never finished. Even now, however, when music had to step back Čiurlionis produced some compositions of great artistic value. "The Sea", a monumental symphonic poem of importance in Lithuanian symphonic literature, sprang from this period in Čiurlionis' life when music and painting were complimenting each other in such a unique manner.

"The Sea" is for a big orchestra with triple woodwinds, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass-clarinet, two bassoons, counterbassoon, six French horns, four trumpets, three trombones, bass-tuba, organ, harp and the usual string quintet. The work begins with a majestic theme in E major which is basic in the whole composition. This theme, repeated in a stately fortissimo, is dominant in the first part. Later, as the composition moves from the "andante" into the "allegro moderato", counterthemes evolve, melodious, not contrasting. A rhythmically contrasting theme makes its appearance and changes into a characteristic undulating episode. Against an ornamented rhythmic background appears a — subsequently often repeated — theme on a descending scale. Then follows a strange episode in which on a typical "basso ostinato" are plaited various lyrical melodies. The composition nears the "storm" episode and its complex, pronouncedly rhythmic, polyphonic structure. This prolonged episode develops into the initial bright E sharp theme which is elaborated at length with counterthemes and repeats and subsides into ornamented orchestral transitions suggesting the play of little waves in a calm sea. Gradually the music becomes completely peaceful. Here begins perhaps the most beautiful episode of the composition. In a 6/8 time signature "basso ostinato" arises a beautiful melody breathing forth a deep sorrow and evoking the image of boundless space and remoteness found in Čiurlionis' paintings. Soon a new melody is introduced and developed into a coda-like, moodily undulating E minor announcing the finale. There is a return to the bright E sharp theme and the composition comes to a somewhat unexpected close, leaving a feeling that after such a lengthy development a longer coda would be more satisfying. The hasty ending may have been a foreboding of the approaching illness and the untimely death of the composer. Neither "The Forest" nor "The Sea" scores are available to the free world at the present because they are in Soviet occupied Lithuania.

What place do national motives occupy in Čiurlionis music? Folk melodies are almost absent from



FROM THE CYCLE "CREATION OF THE WORLD"

Tempera • 1904

his compositions except towards the end of his life when he became interested in folk songs as such and began copying and arranging them. His arrangements are sometimes too chromatic, not really in harmony with the spirit of the song, too instrumental. There are some gems, however ("Run little lambs"—"Bėkit, bareliai") which capture inimitably the melancholy, the sense of the past so inherent in the songs of south-eastern Lithuania.

If pronounced interest in folk music is not characteristic of Čiurlionis' compositions, his music is, nevertheless, reminiscent of the Lithuanian landscape, especially that of his native south-eastern Lithuania. He shares with his fellow countrymen their dreaminess, their melancholy, their yearning towards the mystical.

There is no doubt that Čiurlionis was greater as a painter than as a composer. None the less he is very important to Lithuanian music. In order to realize this he must be judged against the background of his times and compared to his contemporaries. At the end of the 19th century Lithuanian culture in general, but especially Lithuanian music, was far below the international level because of economic, social and political circumstances. Though there were many with musical talent, few were fortunate enough to encounter their Duke Oginski. Čiurlionis had no tradition of individual musical compositions behind him, there was no national encouragement to spur him on (Lithuania became independent seven years after his death), he did not even have the hope of hearing his major compositions played in Lithuania (both "The Forest" and "The Sea" were first performed only in 1936). Out of this musical poverty about him he was able to produce works comparable to those of independent, musically wealthy European countries, to give his countrymen an example, to start a musical tradition for his nation.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE



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Vyacheslav IVANOV, who died as an exile in Rome in 1949, is a Russian poet, essayist, critic and classical scholar of great renown and influence. He is also regarded as one of the principal theoreticians of the philosophical aspects of symbolism. His poetry, esoteric and archaic in diction, has a quality of Byzantine splendor. Ivanov became acquainted with Čiurlionis' art in 1909. He lectured on the Lithuanian visionary painter and published the first version of his essay "Čiurlionis and the problem of the synthesis of arts" in *Apollon*, No. 3, 1914. In its final form the essay was included in Ivanov's volume of studies in criticism and aesthetics, *Borozdy i Mezhi* (Furrows and Boundaries), Moscow, Musaget, 1916. This is the first time that the essay appears in English, in a translation by Tatiana Fedorow.



Vladas JAKUBĖNAS, former professor at the Kaunas Conservatory (1932-1943), now residing in the United States, is an outstanding Lithuanian composer. His work includes symphonies, rhapsodies, string quartets, piano sonatas. As a music critic he has contributed many articles to leading Lithuanian periodicals.



Raymond F. PIPER, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Syracuse University, has been teaching and writing on aesthetics, philosophy and comparative religions since 1920. His studies include "Methaphysics of Personality", "The Fields and Methods of Knowledge" and other critical works. At the present he is writing a study on cosmic art which will have a special chapter on M. K. Čiurlionis.



Aleksis RANNIT's first articles and lectures on Čiurlionis date back to 1936, the time of his first visit to Lithuania. He has published essays and poetry on the Lithuanian painter in leading West European periodicals, as *Das Kunstwerk*, *La Biennale de Venezia*, *Les Arts Plastiques*, *Arts*, *Das Goldene Tor*, *Die Neue Zeitung*. In his essays he tried to define the place of Čiurlionis in modern art, and has accentuated the fact that the Lithuanian painter has been an abstractionist seven years prior to Kandinsky, a metaphysical painter ten years before Pittura Metafisica and a surrealist twenty years prior to the Manifesto of Surrealism.



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